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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to identify and analyze the key elements necessary for the expansion of tourism in rural areas in 15 selected municipalities belonging to the Immediate Geographic Regions of Western Paraná (Brazil), drawing on the successful experiences of five municipalities in the province of Granada (Spain). The proposal for rural producers is framed as a complement to agribusiness, offering new sources of employment and income. The research is applied in nature and, in terms of objectives, both explanatory and descriptive. Primary and secondary data were collected in both regions, aiming to characterize the population (e.g., income, Human Development Index – HDI, Gross Domestic Product – GDP per capita, and employed population) as well as aspects directly related to tourism in rural areas. The findings revealed existing potentialities, such as location, infrastructure, and the presence of tourism development agencies. Furthermore, tourism in rural areas is highlighted as an instrument for preserving natural and cultural heritage, while also serving as a complementary mechanism to mitigate depopulation in these areas. Potential strategies include capacity building for tourism in rural areas producers and entrepreneurs, along with fostering partnerships to position the region as a benchmark in this sector, thereby promoting and showcasing the municipalities' activities and natural assets.

Key words: Rural Development. Neo-endogenous Development. Entrepreneurship. Agritourism.

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é identificar e analisar quais são os elementos necessários para a expansão do turismo em espaço rural em 15 municípios selecionados de Regiões Imediatas do Oeste do Paraná (Brasil), considerando experiências de êxito de cinco municípios da província de Granada (Espanha). A proposta aos produtores rurais é de uma complementação ao agronegócio, oportunizando novas fontes de empregos e renda. A pesquisa foi: quanto à natureza, aplicada; e quanto ao objetivo, explicativa e descritiva. Foram realizadas pesquisas primárias e secundárias em ambas as regiões, visando conhecer e caracterizar a população (dados como renda, Índice de Desenvolvimento Humano – IDH, Produto Interno Bruto – PIB *per capita* e população ocupada), além de aspectos relacionados ao turismo em espaço rural. Como resultados, observaram-se potencialidades já existentes (localização, infraestrutura e presença de agências fomentadoras de turismo). Além disso, ressalta-se a importância do turismo em espaço rural para a preservação dos patrimônios natural e cultural, bem como pode ser um coadjuvante para frear a despovoação destas áreas. As estratégias que poderiam ser utilizadas envolvem a formação dos produtores e empreendedores de turismo em espaço rural, e as parcerias entre eles para tornar a região uma referência nesse setor, encantando e divulgando as atividades e belezas dos municípios.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento Rural. Desenvolvimento Neo-endógeno. Empreendedorismo. Agroturismo.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, rural areas have undergone profound transformations, including the adoption of concepts such as cooperation, competitiveness, sustainability, and multiactivity. These changes are also linked to the complexity of defining “the rural,” whether through legislation — specific to each country — or through diverse criteria for delimiting rural space, such as geography, economy, population density, and green areas, among others. A transformation can be observed in the functions of rural areas, which have shifted from being solely providers of primary products to incorporating agro-industries and new activities, such as tourism in rural areas (Foronda Robes, 2002; Kageyama, 2008; Leeuwen, 2010; Wiggins & Proctor, 2001; Roque, 2013).

In the context of tourism in rural areas, the concept is equally multifaceted, encompassing activities traditionally carried out on farms or in rural areas, such as horseback riding; harvesting or fishing experiences with subsequent payment; the production of artisanal goods (jams, cookies, beverages, bread, etc.); as well as activities associated with nature and the rural environment, including hiking, canoeing, camping, climbing, hot springs, geological, educational, and religious tourism, among others (Pulido Fernandez & Sáez Cala, 2011; Tomazzoni, 2007).



According to Martín and Benito (2009), individuals seeking tourism in rural areas tend to prefer spaces or activities requiring shorter highway travel times, which lends this form of tourism a character of proximity-based leisure, typically of short duration, ranging from a few hours to a weekend.

This research sought to analyze Western Paraná (Brazil) in relation to tourism in rural areas. To this end, 15 municipalities were selected from four Immediate Geographic Regions¹: Cascavel, Foz do Iguaçu, Marechal Cândido Rondon, and Toledo, which will be described in the methodology and results. Despite the strong performance of agribusiness, public agents and rural producers—particularly family farmers—have sought alternative strategies to expand employment and income, exploring opportunities framed within the so-called “New Rural” perspective.

As a model, this study draws on successful projects developed in five municipalities in the province of Granada (Spain), which will also be presented in the methodology and results. The selection of this region is justified by certain similarities with Western Paraná, especially its emphasis on agriculture (vegetables, fruits, and olive groves) and livestock farming. According to data from the Institute of Statistics and Cartography of Andalusia (IECA, 2023), the province had a population of 925,046, with Granada being the most populous municipality (233,680 inhabitants).

Grounded in the theoretical framework to be developed and supported by the collection of data and information from the aforementioned territories, the following research question was proposed: How can tourism in rural areas be implemented in Western Paraná? It is hypothesized that the implementation or expansion of tourism in rural areas in the Immediate Regions of Western Paraná could foster the emergence of new economic activities (rural and non-rural), enhance the productive diversification of the territory, generate income, promote environmental preservation and sustainable production, and ultimately strengthen socio-territorial development as a whole.

The incorporation of tourism in rural areas into family farming properties, as well as small and medium-sized farms, could further foster environmental awareness and sustainability, as the surroundings of these properties and the tourism activities carried out therein would gain greater value when grounded in nature and environmental preservation. It could also foster civic consciousness,

¹ Immediate Geographic Regions are defined as structures organized around nearby urban centers to meet the immediate needs of the population, such as the purchase of durable and non-durable consumer goods, employment opportunities, access to health and education services, and the provision of public services, including offices of the National Institute of Social Security (INSS), the Ministry of Labor, judicial services, among others (IBGE, 2017).

safeguarding not only natural heritage but also the region's cultural, social, religious, and historical heritage (Kageyama, 2004; Ribeiro, 2016).

According to Pulido Fernández (2008) and Vera Rebollo et al. (2013), the development of tourism in rural areas could contribute to the diversification of the rural economy, the creation and expansion of businesses in the service sector, and the reallocation of family labor, in addition to providing a new source of income and employment. All of this requires the participation of the rural population, contributing to the transformation of these spaces and, in turn, fostering regional and local development.

This paper is divided into five sections, with this introduction being the first. Subsequently, a brief presentation of the theoretical framework used to support the analyses will be provided. The data and methods will be presented in the third section, followed by the observed results. Subsequently, the conclusions will highlight some of the potentialities, as well as suggested strategies for the development of tourism in rural areas in Western Paraná (Brazil).

CONSIDERATIONS ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The definition of rural or rural areas is complex due to the diversity of elements and perspectives that may be encompassed. In general, rural areas are associated with primary production (agriculture, livestock farming, forestry, etc.); however, in recent decades, a plurality of activities and uses of rural areas has emerged (Esparcia et al., 2016).

It is necessary to highlight certain differences between rural areas in Brazil and Spain, given that both regions will be analyzed. In Brazil, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) proposed in 2023 a new methodological approach for classifying rural areas, defining them as territories with low population density, a strong connection to primary production, limited landscape transformation, and the possible presence of small urbanized nuclei or natural fragments (IBGE, 2023).

In Spain, Law No. 45/2007, Article 3, characterizes and defines: (1) rural environment, as municipalities with fewer than 30,000 inhabitants and a population density of less than 100 inhabitants per km²; (2) rural area, understood as a regional (*comarca*) or sub-provincial scope, delimited by the competent Autonomous Community; and (3) rural municipality, with a resident population of fewer than 5,000 inhabitants (España, 2007). In Andalusia (the region under study), the proposal by Reig Martínez,



Goerlich Gisbert, and Cantarino Martí (2016) further differentiates each of the three categories suggested by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union, based on land use and travel time from centers of economic activity and services.

Among the conceptual differences, the most relevant is item 3 of the Spanish legislation, which defines rural municipalities as those with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, indicating that the tourism taking place in these municipalities is tourism in rural areas — whether gastronomic, cultural, historical, adventure-based, ecotourism, or farm tourism. For example, of the 174 municipalities in the province of Granada, 73 have fewer than 1,000 inhabitants; 28 have between 1,000 and 2,000 inhabitants; and 32 have between 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants, indicating that more than 75% of these municipalities are small and fall within the category of rural municipalities (Junta de Andalucía, 2024).

According to Martín and Benito (2009), rural space has been distancing itself from agrarian space (used solely for agriculture and livestock farming), transforming into multifunctional areas (residential, environmental preservation, and agro-industrial production), diversified (agricultural and livestock production, tourism, leisure, etc.), and dynamic. In addition, by serving as a labor supply for cities, it has introduced the need for infrastructures that encourage the permanence of the population in rural areas. Márquez Fernández (2002) identifies another important factor for rural development: innovation, which may be associated with the creation of new products or services, as well as new forms of management and organization.

Gkartzios and Lowe (2019) note that the search for a theory of rural development that encompasses its various aspects has been extensive. Attention is directed to governance mechanisms, as well as to the competencies of rural policy, which bring together production and consumption interests in addition to rural characteristics. And this may be influenced by the development model adopted:

- Exogenous (top-down): rural development policies prioritized the modernization of productive spaces through homogeneous actions across different rural areas, without the participation of the local population.

- Endogenous (bottom-up): grounded in case studies, local products and knowledge, and the appropriate use of resources, with an emphasis on local actors (Cunha Filho, 2015).

- Neo-endogenous: considered a blend of the exogenous and endogenous models, aiming to reorganize public intervention by moving it away from individual sectors, fostering the socioeconomic well-being of local activities, and incorporating research development by comparatively analyzing similar models and projects before adapting them to the local reality.

The three models can be found depending on the configuration of each country or region. For instance, in Brazil, the exogenous model can be identified in cities and regions where infrastructures or projects are implemented without considering the views of the local community. Exogenous models are present in several cities, such as those in the Western region of Paraná, where meetings are held with community members to hear their needs and to direct investments more effectively (Nunes et al., 2022; Lobão & Staduto, 2018).

The neo-endogenous model has gained prominence for being more participatory and for considering each territory as unique, with an emphasis on diversity and plurality, and for its connection with tourism in rural areas (Pulido Fernández, 2008; Vera Rebollo et al., 2013). In the Brazilian context, it emerges in cities that have sought to implement tourism in rural areas, as their public and private leaders have studied successful projects and practices from other locations (including abroad) and adapted them to their own reality, striving for the integration of the actors involved. As an example, there is the Paraná Cheese Route, developed with the support of the Rural Development Institute (IDR) of Paraná, in partnership with municipalities and cheese producers, by collecting experiences and information and transferring this knowledge to other municipalities and producers (IDR-PR, 2025).

Cejudo García et al. (2021) further identify four basic dimensions necessary for the proper implementation of the neo-endogenous model: (1) Institutional – establishing governance for territorial management, functioning through norms and rules, with cooperation among local actors; (2) Social and Territorial Identity – formed by local actors, their relationships, and the values they share with the territory, where the sense of belonging becomes a cornerstone of rural development; (3) Innovation – encompassing not only new products or processes but also social innovations and

new community arrangements; and (4) Economic Diversification – aimed at fostering new sectors and actors, with the objective of successfully stimulating territorial dynamism.

According to Sánchez Escolano and Ruiz Moya (2022), developing tourism in rural areas may represent an opportunity to strengthen the positive relationship between landscape, region, and product, while also promoting and disseminating environmental sustainability, fostering both economic and social development, enhancing educational and cultural standards, advancing environmental preservation and awareness, and encouraging the establishment of new economic activities that generate employment and income, thereby triggering or expanding rural development as a whole.

According to the findings of Voth (2024), in a study on cooperation between tourism and rural development in southern Spain, tourism projects alone are insufficient to overcome structural and functional difficulties. However, when projects are grounded in natural or cultural heritage (or both), the promotion of tourism can be regarded as an important development strategy to stimulate economic diversification.

TOURISM IN RURAL AREAS

Tourism in rural areas can be considered a segment within the broader field of tourism, encompassing related products and services, basic elements, and subcategories, and it may be classified as a concept with multiple meanings (Pulido Fernández, 2008). Rural tourism, in turn, is associated with activities specific to the traditions of the rural world, carried out on rural properties, and is positioned as one of the possible activities within tourism in rural areas (Pulido Fernández, 2008; Vera Rebollo et al., 2013).

According to Silva, Vilarinho, and Dale (1998, p. 14), tourism in rural areas encompasses:

[...] all activities carried out in non-urban environments, consisting of leisure activities in rural settings in various forms defined according to supply: rural tourism, agritourism, ecological tourism or ecotourism, adventure tourism, business tourism, health tourism, cultural tourism, sports tourism, [...] which may or may not be complementary. [our translation]

Barrera (2006) states that, in Latin America, tourism in rural areas can be classified into 11 modalities: (1) agritourism (daily agricultural or livestock activities); (2) ecotourism (natural environments without contamination); (3) cultural (museums, farms, etc.); (4) adventure (natural



surroundings for activities such as climbing and hiking); (5) sports (activities such as hunting and fishing, depending on national regulations); (6) technical-scientific (technological innovations, field days, among others); (7) educational (educational farms); (8) events (seminars and social gatherings); (9) health (equine therapy, hot springs, and anti-stress therapies); (10) gastronomic (cheese and wine routes, rural restaurants, and colonial coffee); and (11) ethnic (in Indigenous or quilombola communities).

According to Vera Rebollo et al. (2013), for tourism in rural areas to serve as a factor of local or territorial development, the participation of public administration at the municipal, state, and federal levels is essential. Such involvement may include promoting the implementation of infrastructure, supporting the training of tourism promoters, and drafting laws and regulations to ensure the sustainable (both environmentally and economically) functioning of tourism activities.

Contributing to this discussion, Rocha Junior et al. (2024) addressed the relevance of infrastructure (such as roads and telecommunications) for local and regional development, as it constitutes the link between residents in rural areas and urban centers. They also confirmed that rural roads in good condition can stimulate tourism in rural areas and improve the quality of life of the population.

According to Lickorish and Jenkins (1997, p. 83), tourism emerges as an additional alternative to foster economic and regional development.

The main economic impacts of tourism are linked to foreign exchange earnings, contributions to state revenues, job and income generation, and the stimulation of regional development. The first two consequences occur at the macroeconomic or national level, while the other three impacts take place at the regional or local scale. [our translation]

Tourism, in its various segments, therefore, has the capacity to transform multiple areas, stimulating the economy as a whole and creating employment and income opportunities for the local population, both directly and indirectly. This occurs by enhancing the natural, cultural, human, and social heritage of regions, while also diversifying the economic activities of cities and provinces.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES AND STUDY AREAS

Aiming at the proper characterization of the study areas for subsequent data analysis, in order to identify potentialities and propose strategies for the development of tourism in rural areas in Western Paraná — based on the experiences of the province of Granada (Spain) — a qualitative research design was adopted. According to Sampieri, Collado, and Lucio (2014), qualitative research is dedicated to understanding phenomena by examining them from the perspective of participants in their natural environment and in relation to the context — that is, how individuals perceive their surroundings, the phenomena, and the events around them, reflecting their points of view.

The research was applied in nature, characterized by its practical orientation. In other words, its results can be applied to problems or issues occurring in society (Marconi & Lakatos, 2017). It was descriptive, seeking to specify the characteristics of a population or phenomena; and explanatory, as it attempted to elucidate the phenomenon. It may also be characterized as documentary research, as it analyzed data, reports, and official documents available in print and on websites.

To strengthen this investigation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with local stakeholders and managers involved in tourism in rural areas, in the five selected municipalities of the province of Granada (Spain) and in the 15 selected municipalities of Western Paraná (Brazil). The project, questionnaires, and the Informed Consent Form (ICF) were submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (REP) of UNIOESTE, through the Plataforma Brasil system, and approved on February 27, 2025. These documents stated that respondents would not be identified by name and that their personal information would remain confidential.

The main purpose of the field research, both in Spain and in Brazil, was to identify in loco the potentialities of the regions and the strategies employed, as well as the distinctive features of the regions, in order to obtain the necessary inputs and variables for the qualitative analysis. The questionnaires were designed to collect information related to tourism in rural areas, such as the perception of quality of life and the environment; the classification and segmentation of tourism in the municipality; infrastructure, attractions, and their state of preservation (conservation); whether tourism in rural areas is considered beneficial and for what reasons; and whether the municipality or other governmental bodies provide training for rural producers or entrepreneurs.

To support this analysis, secondary data from the regions under study were collected from sources such as IBGE, IPARDES, FIRJAN, IECA, INE, UNWTO, among other official and reliable websites. These secondary data made available in both countries are not always comparable; therefore, efforts were made to identify data suitable for analysis and comparison, such as population, GDP per capita, income, HDI, and tourism-related data, among others. Table 1 presents the structure of the methodological procedures adopted.

Table 1 | Summary of the research methodological procedures

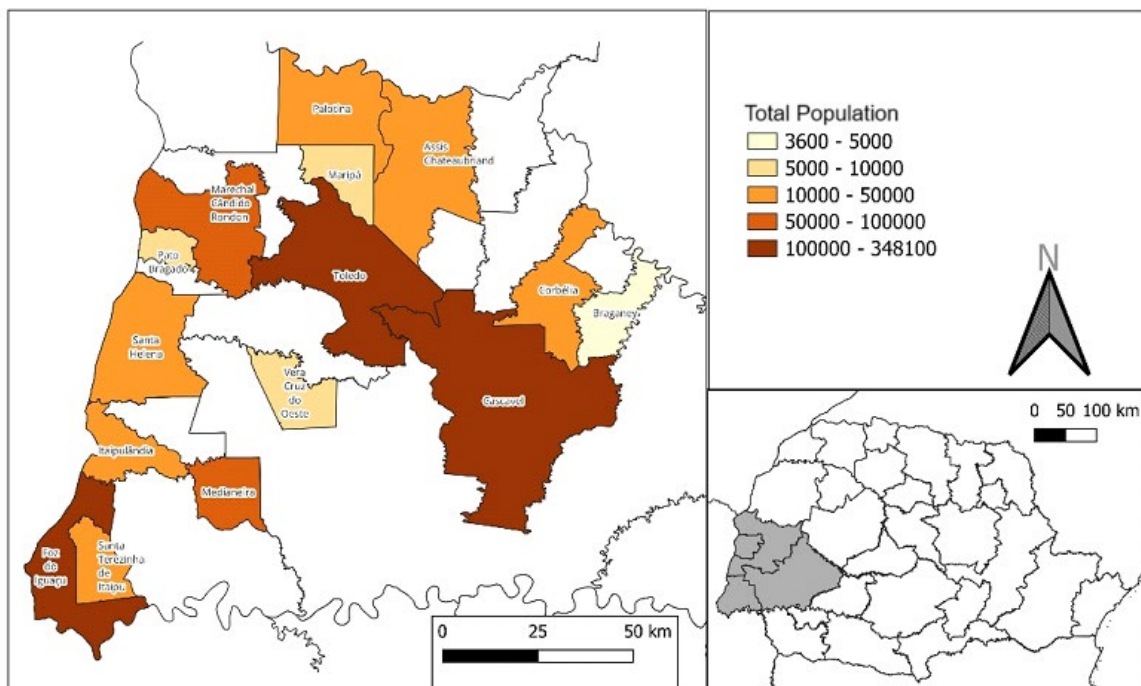
Nature	Applied research
Objective	Descriptive and explanatory research
Approach	Qualitative research
Sampling	Non-probabilistic intentional approach
Research techniques	Semi-structured questionnaires; collection of secondary data; consultation of bibliographies and documents
Research location	Five municipalities in the province of Granada (Spain): Alfacar, Beas de Granada, Guadix, Monachil, and Píñar; and 15 municipalities in Western Paraná (Brazil): Assis Chateaubriand, Braganey, Capitão Leônidas Marques, Cascavel, Corbélia, Foz do Iguaçu, Itaipulândia, Marechal Cândido Rondon, Maripá, Medianeira, Palotina, Pato Bragado, Santa Helena, Santa Lúcia, Santa Terezinha de Itaipu, Toledo, Três Barras do Paraná, and Vera Cruz do Oeste
Period	Between August 2024 and June 2025
Respondents	Rural producers, directors of rural unions or associations, mayors, tourism directors or secretaries, and owners and workers (managers) of enterprises engaged in tourism in rural areas

Source: prepared by the authors.



As shown in Table 1, fifteen municipalities were selected in Western Paraná (Brazil); these were chosen because they already had a Tourism Activities Report prepared in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, based on a survey conducted in 2024. The underlying assumption was that the municipalities that had responded to the Ministry of Tourism already possessed more structured information regarding tourism. Figure 1 presents the map showing the location of the municipalities in the aforementioned region.

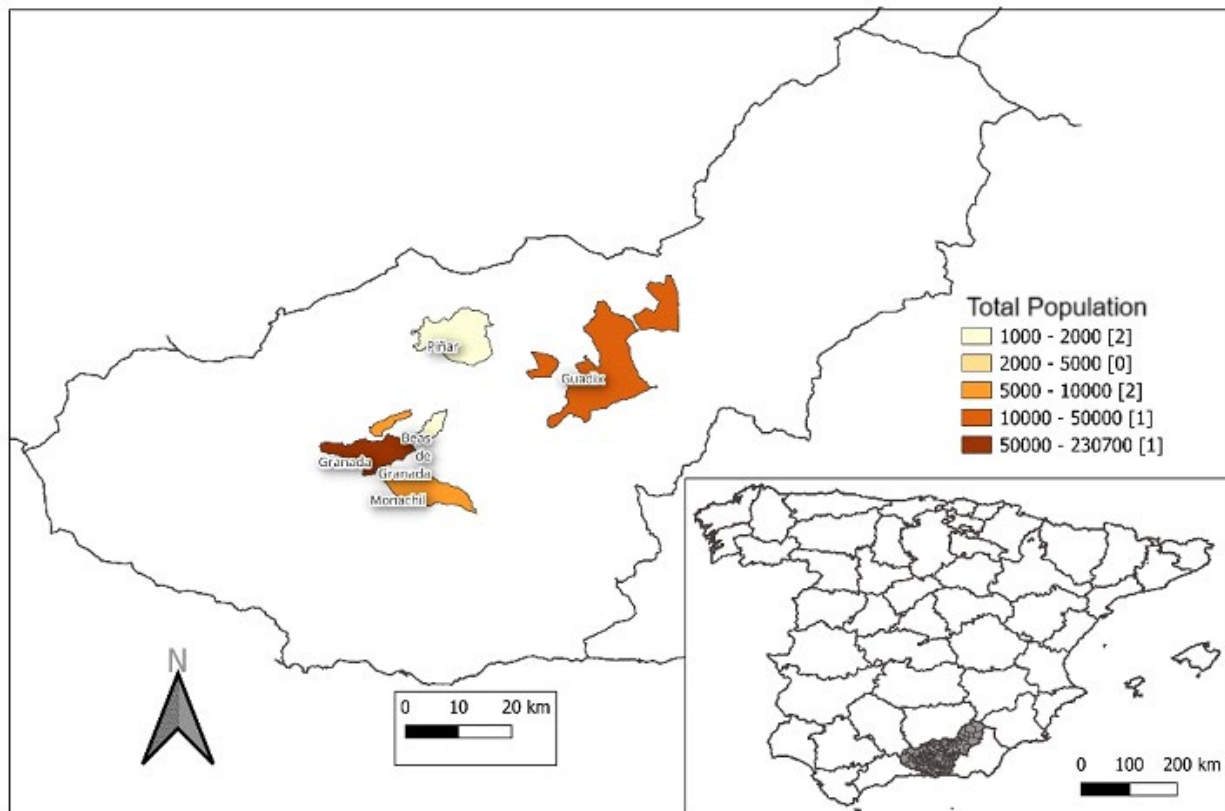
Figure 1 | Location map of the 15 municipalities selected from the Immediate Geographic Regions of Western Paraná (Brazil), with total population data (2022)



Source: prepared by the authors with data from the Demographic Census (IBGE, 2024).

As shown in Figure 1, the municipalities with the largest populations are Cascavel (348,051 inhabitants), Foz do Iguaçu (285,415), and Toledo (150,470), which are considered the development poles of the region. Meanwhile, the smallest municipalities are Braganey (4,854 inhabitants), Pato Bragado (5,733), and Maripá (6,555). It is observed that these municipalities meet the premise of proximity (neighborhood) for the development of tourism in rural areas. Similarly, population and proximity data were collected for five municipalities in the province of Granada (Spain): Alfacar, Beas de Granada, Guadix, Monachil, and Píñar, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 | Location of the selected municipalities in the Province of Granada (Spain) and the provincial capital (Granada), classified by total population (2022)



Source: prepared by the authors with data from IECA (2024).

As shown in Figure 2, these municipalities are located in close proximity to each other and to the provincial capital, Granada. They were selected because they offer tourism in rural areas activities that could be further developed or that share similarities with those in Western Paraná, such as gastronomy, lodging, hiking trails, religious and cultural tourism, among others.

Although Granada (the capital) is not part of this analysis, it was deemed necessary to include it on the map to highlight its proximity and possible influence on tourism in rural areas in the selected municipalities. Granada (the capital) has the largest population (230,064 inhabitants), followed by Guadix (18,493), Monachil (8,182), Alfacar (5,585), Píñar (1,106), and Beas de Granada (986). Another noteworthy aspect is the municipality of Guadix, which has three geographically separated population centers — an uncommon characteristic that gives it a high level of rurality and dispersion (OTEA, 2022). The next section will present some results and considerations derived from the analyses conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

IMMEDIATE GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS OF WESTERN PARANÁ (BRAZIL)

An analysis of the secondary data collected revealed that in the 15 selected municipalities of Western Paraná (Brazil), there are currently nearly 1,070,000 inhabitants living within an area of approximately 9,600 km². Three cities can be considered regional poles — Cascavel, Foz do Iguaçu, and Toledo — due to their dynamism in sectors such as industry, commerce, and services. The region is notable for agribusiness, with the presence of private and cooperative agro-industries of medium and large scale, linked to family farming as well as small and medium-sized producers. In addition, the region is internationally recognized for its environmental conservation units, particularly Iguaçu National Park and the surroundings of the Itaipu Lake, which contain wildlife corridors and areas dedicated to flora preservation.

In economic terms, among the 15 selected municipalities, GDP per capita (the sum of all municipal production divided by the number of inhabitants) ranged between €4,180 and €14,541², with Palotina (€14,540.86) and Foz do Iguaçu (€12,298.79) standing out as the highest. These values can be explained by the economic dynamism of the municipalities and the presence of representative enterprises that generate higher revenue, such as the strong cooperatives and agribusiness sector in Palotina, and the Itaipu Hydroelectric Plant together with tourism (commerce and services) in Foz do Iguaçu. Also in Foz do Iguaçu, attractions include the Iguaçu Falls, which in 2024 received more than 1.8 million visitors; Itaipu Binational (689,000 visitors); the Bird Park (821,000 visitors); and the Three Borders Landmark (Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina), with more than 450,000 visitors. A percentage of these tourists could be encouraged to experience tourism in rural areas in nearby cities, which would help to boost this segment in the region.

Regarding average monthly wages, the municipalities with the highest values were Foz do Iguaçu (€685.50), followed by Marechal Cândido Rondon and Medianeira (€634.72), and Cascavel, Palotina, Santa Helena, and Toledo (€609.33). The lowest average monthly wage was found in Maripá (€355.44), followed by Itaipulândia (€482.39).

2 Exchange rate on 02/14/2025: €1.00 = R\$5.979.



Employment data may indicate that, in addition to income availability (as they are employed), the region's population is willing to engage in weekend activities to enjoy leisure time with family or friends, as is the case with tourism in rural areas. According to the data, Braganey has the lowest percentage of employed population (16.93%), followed by Vera Cruz do Oeste (18.1%) and Santa Terezinha de Itaipu (20.29%). As for the highest percentages of employed population, these are found in Palotina (59.98%), Toledo (49.47%), Medianeira (46.48%), and Cascavel (44.32%). These municipalities host large-scale agro-industries, such as the C-Vale Cooperative in Palotina; the private agribusiness Brasil Foods (BRF) and the Primato and Coamo cooperatives in Toledo; the Lar Agricultural Cooperative in Medianeira; and Coopavel in Cascavel.

Other data analyzed are related to the population's quality of life, such as the Municipal Human Development Index (MHDI), which, according to UNDP (2025), is a measure 'that assesses long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. The available data are from 2010 and indicate that 13 municipalities fall within the High HDI range (0.700 to 0.799), while two municipalities fall within the Medium HDI range (0.600 to 0.699). The region can be considered to be in development, as the 2018 IFDM results in Education (13 municipalities) and Health (14 municipalities) fall within the range classified as High Development (0.80 to 1.00). What still requires improvement is the Employment and Income dimension, in which six municipalities were classified in the Regular Development range (0.40 to 0.60) and two were in the Low Development range (0.00 to 0.40).

Focusing the analysis on tourism, in the Brazilian case, there are scarce data disaggregated by tourism segment, with most information presented in a generalized manner. Nevertheless, such data can serve as a tool for analysis and for structuring projects, since in municipalities where recognized tourism activities are already underway, it is more likely that tourism in rural areas — both within the municipality and in the surrounding areas — may benefit from the influx of tourists, the allocation of resources and investments (public and private), thereby generating financial returns and fostering regional development.

The municipality that stands out the most in tourism within the region is Foz do Iguaçu, internationally recognized for the Iguaçu Falls. However, Cascavel and Toledo have begun to expand their role in this sector through event and business tourism, while all municipalities are engaged in tourism

in rural areas, even if still at an early stage. In 2021, wages of employees in the tourism sector ranged between €202.70 and €405.40.

In the analysis of the Tourism Activity Reports from the Ministry of Tourism, as well as the questionnaires applied, five main economic activities were identified: Agriculture and Livestock, Basic Industry, Commerce, Services, and Tourism. Toledo was the municipality that mentioned the most activities, while Foz do Iguaçu highlighted its three main elements — Tourism, Services, and Commerce — which reflect their importance to the municipality. Pato Bragado, Palotina, and Medianeira cited Agriculture and Livestock as their main economic activity; however, in all three municipalities there are influences from Commerce and Services, primarily related to Agribusiness. Cascavel was also surprising in citing only Commerce, and Agriculture and Livestock, as the city is recognized for its Services sector across the entire Western region of Paraná (healthcare, banking, education, gastronomy, among others).

As for the tourism segments mentioned, these were: Ecotourism, Religious, Business and Events, Rural, Adventure, Cultural, Leisure, Nautical, Fishing, Sun and Beach, and Gastronomic. The question included in the report was: ‘Main Tourism Segment of the Municipality’. The municipality that indicated the highest number of segments was Itaipulândia, with six: Ecotourism, Business and Events, Cultural, Nautical, Fishing, and Sun and Beach. Foz do Iguaçu, Palotina, and Santa Helena followed, with five segments each. At the other extreme, Assis Chateaubriand, Cascavel, and Medianeira each mentioned only one segment.

Gastronomic tourism was rarely mentioned, even though most cities hold festivals (municipal, district, or neighborhood) that offer traditional foods. The region stands out as a producer of animal protein (swine, poultry, and fish), which are offered as delicacies prepared with a variety of seasonings and in different forms, such as the famous *Porco no Rolete* (whole pig roasted on a spit) in Toledo, *Porco à Paraguaia* (pork prepared in the Paraguayan style, typically stuffed and roasted) in the district of Vila Ipiranga (Toledo), *Boi no Rolete* (whole ox roasted on a spit) in Marechal Cândido Rondon, and *tilapia* (fish), which serves as the basis for numerous dishes in Maripá (baked, moqueca, stuffed pumpkin, chicken salad, lasagna, with vegetables, fried, grilled, etc.); in addition to various restaurants dispersed across several points of the region.

Narrowing the analysis to tourism in rural areas,, the municipalities that cited this segment were: Braganey (waterfalls, the Cyclists' Pilgrimage, and the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Salete); Corbélia (Lake Melissa Hydroelectric Plant, Cycling Pilgrimage, Colonial Veranda, and local fair); Medianeira (Salet Hill and Espigão Norte Hill); Palotina (São Camilo State Park, Agro Trails, and the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Salete); Santa Helena (Biological Refuge and Terra das Águas Resort); and Toledo, which mentioned its attractions in response to another question ("Does the municipality have programs or initiatives for tourism activities?"), highlighting the Flowers and Wine Circuit and the Cheese Route.

Several municipalities have shown interest in implementing or expanding tourism in rural areas activities, primarily as a means to supplement the income of local farmers. They are also aware that, with the influx of tourists, the municipality can foster broader development, generating employment and income in sectors such as services, commerce, lodging, and food, as well as contributing to tax revenues. This corroborates the assertions of Pulido Fernández (2008) and Vera Rebollo et al. (2013), who argue that tourism in rural area can contribute to the diversification of the rural economy, the creation and expansion of businesses in the service sector, and the generation of new sources of income and employment, thereby fostering both regional and local development.

Another question was: "Does the municipality offer courses, programs, and / or professional training actions for tourism?" Only six municipalities reported offering some type of course or training: Braganey (courses, technical visits, and guidance); Cascavel (nature tourism guide); Foz do Iguaçu (Bachelor's Degree in Tourism and Hospitality – Unioeste; regional tour guide – Agricultural College and SENAC³; tourism activities – SENAC and IHGT⁴; training for taxi and tourist transport professionals); Palotina (rural tourism with SENAR⁵); Santa Helena (professional development courses, customer service, service and business management, social media, and rural tourism); and Toledo (courses offered by SENAR in partnership with ADETUR⁶ *Riquezas do Oeste* (Wealths of the West), the Rural Union, and SENAC).

3 SENAC: Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Comercial.

4 IHGT: Instituto de Hotelaria, Gastronomia e Turismo (Foz do Iguaçu).

5 SENAR: National Rural Learning Service.

6 ADETUR: Tourism Development Agency.

All municipalities indicated an interest in providing capacity-building programs for rural producers and entrepreneurs engaged in tourism in rural areas. However, they indicated that producers often encounter barriers or difficulties in accessing training providers, either due to limited financial resources or a lack of awareness of ongoing programs and initiatives.

An illustrative example of the need for training courses or workshops concerns Law No. 11,771/2008 (Brazil, 2008), which establishes key elements of the National Tourism Policy. In 2024, significant amendments were introduced to this legislation, particularly concerning tourism in rural areas. Family farmers and rural producers engaged in tourism-related services may register with Cadastur⁷. Most importantly, under the revised legal framework, the processing and commercialization of agro-industrial products for tourism purposes are formally recognized as rural activities.

Respondents also highlighted the strategic relevance of Foz do Iguaçu and the substantial volume of tourists who could be targeted with information and tailored offers (through municipal tourism offices or travel agencies) to extend their length of stay and engage in excursions into tourism in rural areas of nearby municipalities, assuming a maximum travel radius of 150 km. Assuming that only 10% of visitors to Iguaçu Falls were to extend their trips to the surrounding municipalities, this would represent an inflow of more than 15,000 individuals per month into tourism in rural areas across the region.

One factor mentioned that may hinder the expansion of tourism in rural areas is the shortage of labor, since, as these are small properties or family farming units, only the family members themselves are engaged in the activities. Thus, in order to properly receive tourists — providing explanations about the site and its history, guiding walking or cycling trails, and producing artisanal goods — these properties require labor that is currently insufficient. On the other hand, this may serve as an incentive for hiring young graduates, since such activity can expand employment opportunities for these professionals.

PROVINCE OF GRANADA (SPAIN)

The Province of Granada (Spain) comprises 174 municipalities, of which five were selected for the analysis of tourism in rural areas: Alfacar, Beas de Granada, Guadix, Monachil, and Píñar. These municipalities were selected because they exhibit characteristics of tourism in rural areas similar to those found in Western Paraná (Brazil), such as gastronomic tourism, rural lodging facilities, and

7 Cadastur: system for registering individuals and legal entities engaged in the tourism sector.

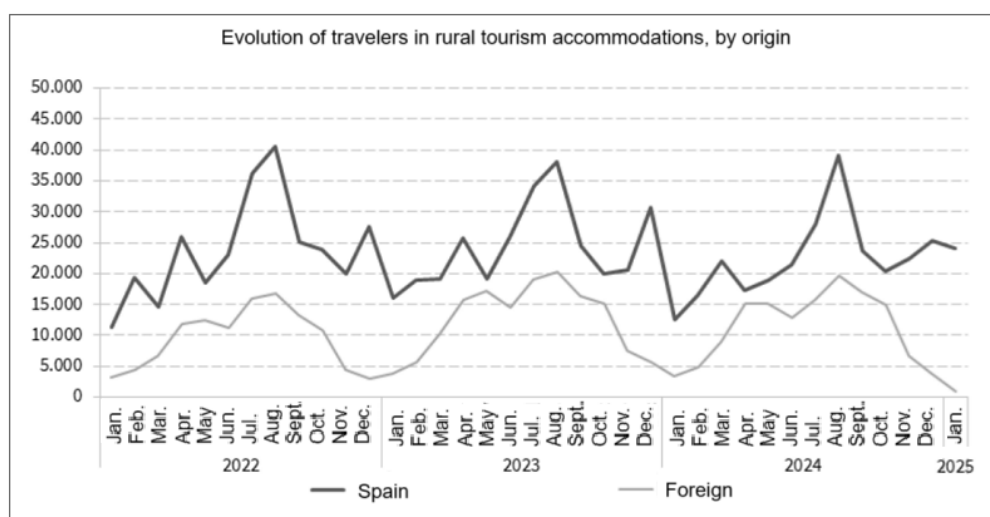


spaces for hiking and walking trails. Furthermore, they are located in proximity to a larger city with significant tourist flows (Granada).

In the selected municipalities, a little over 34,000 inhabitants currently reside within an area of 578.28 km². The city of Granada, in turn, has just over 230,000 inhabitants and serves as the driving hub of the region, with its historically and culturally renowned tourism recognized worldwide. In addition, it exerts a significant influence on tourism in rural areas of the selected municipalities. With regard to economic data, Spain does not provide GDP per capita or HDI figures at the municipal level, but only at the provincial or autonomous community level. In 2022, Spain's GDP per capita was €28,750, while in Andalusia it reached €21,495, and in the province of Granada it stood at €18,537. Regarding the HDI, in 2022 Spain registered a value of 0.911, while Andalusia recorded 0.881 (Datos Macro, 2024; UNDP, 2024; Global Data Lab, 2025).

With regard to tourism in rural areas, data are provided by the National Statistics Institute (INE, 2024) and the Institute of Statistics and Cartography of Andalusia (IECA, 2024), and are presented at the national level, by Autonomous Communities, and by provinces. In 2023, in the province of Granada, there were 38,235 travelers (nearly 70% of whom were Spanish), with an average stay of 2.55 overnight stays. Figure 3 presents the evolution of the number of travelers in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, accommodated in rural tourism establishments, disaggregated by origin (domestic or foreign).

Figure 3 | Monthly evolution (January 2022 to January 2025) of the number of travelers in rural tourism accommodations in Andalusia, by origin (domestic or foreign)



Source: IECA (2024).



As shown in Figure 3, tourism in rural areas maintains activity throughout the year, with peaks occurring during the holiday period (August), as well as a noticeable increase in December. Among the types of accommodation, rural houses, followed by rural hotels and apartments, are the most frequently used, with designated camping areas also playing a relevant role. It is also evident that domestic tourists (from Spain) outnumber international visitors, which supports the hypothesis of adjacent (neighboring) tourism.

The interviews conducted in the municipalities of the province of Granada revealed that, despite the persistence of certain challenges, there is already a clear understanding that tourism in rural areas can be beneficial for both the city and the region, as it generates employment and income for local residents as well as revenue for municipalities through taxes and service fees. There was also unanimous recognition of the importance of Granada as a hub for services, hotels, and commerce, as well as its role as both an origin and destination for a significant share of visitors, owing to its proximity and well-developed road connections.

The cities possess cultural and historical attractions; however, those located in natural or protected environments, which allow for outdoor activities, are the most sought after. They also emphasized the need to promote a transversal form of tourism (inclusive of all age groups and catering to entire families), offering activities for adults while also providing options specifically designed for children. For instance, in bread-making workshops or at the *jamón*⁸ (ham-curing) facilities, activities are typically designed for children, while adults may engage in hiking or cycling trails.

An important point highlighted by one of the interviewees is that tourism in rural areas can be developed anywhere — whether in large or small towns, with limited or abundant resources. What is essential are attractive activities that distinguish the place from others, ensuring that visitors feel satisfied with a pleasant environment, courteous service, and well-prepared products, thereby creating affective memories that encourage them to return.

8 *Jamón* refers to dry-cured ham made from the hind leg of the pig, salted and naturally cured. It is regarded as a gastronomic delicacy. Among the most highly valued and flavorful varieties is the so-called Pata Negra (named after the pigs' black hooves). The town of Jabugo, in southern Spain, is widely recognized as the birthplace of Spanish *jamón* (Carrasco, S. *Jamón de Jabugo*. Jornal Maturidades, PUC-SP, São Paulo, 2016).

An important factor for the effective development of tourism in rural areas in the province of Granada is the involvement of public administration at the municipal, regional, and national levels. Such participation can foster the implementation of infrastructure, support the training of tourism stakeholders, and contribute to the formulation of laws and regulations, as emphasized by Vera Rebollo et al. (2013).

Another relevant component of tourism in rural areas in Spain, particularly in Andalusia, is its role in attempting to mitigate, at least partially, the depopulation of rural zones by generating new sources of employment and, consequently, income. Part of the resources originate from the LEADER⁹ programs, which aim to promote underutilized endogenous resources, such as natural and cultural heritage. However, there is still a lack of specific studies on depopulation, and it can be inferred that tourism in rural areas has contributed to the stabilization of the population over time (where implemented), by playing a significant role in the local economy (Maroto Martos et al., 2024).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research aimed to identify and analyze the key elements required for the expansion of tourism in rural areas across 15 selected municipalities in the Western region of Paraná, Brazil, while considering successful models and experiences drawn from five municipalities in the province of Granada, Spain. It was found that tourism in rural areas can contribute to the diversification of the rural economy by fostering the creation or expansion of enterprises (such as family agro-industries, restaurants, and accommodations), the reallocation of family labor, and the generation of new employment opportunities and income sources, thereby positively influencing regional development as a whole.

It was observed that the 15 municipalities selected from the Western region of Paraná possess significant potential to implement and expand tourism in rural areas. The first potential lies in their geographic location, as these municipalities are situated near Foz do Iguaçu, a city with a well-established and internationally recognized tourism sector. Through public-private partnerships (involving municipal governments, the state government, travel agencies, and tourism development agencies), tourism in rural areas could be promoted in the surrounding municipalities.

9 LEADER: *Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale* (Links Between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy).



Another potential lies in the existing road infrastructure connecting the municipalities: several paved rural roads, mobile phone coverage in all urban areas and in some rural zones, as well as the presence of rural accommodations and restaurants, which already serve a still limited demand from tourists.

Another noteworthy element is the existence of thematic Routes, such as the Paraná Cheese Route and the Lavender Route, developed in partnership with IDR-PR. Some municipalities in the region, including Toledo, Palotina, and Cascavel, are already integrated into these initiatives. Adding to these potentialities is the presence of tourism development agencies, such as ADETUR *Riquezas do Oeste* (ADETUR Wealths of the West) and ADETUR *Cataratas e Caminhos* (ADETUR Waterfalls and Paths), which support both general tourism entrepreneurs and those engaged in tourism in rural areas, particularly in matters of training, regulatory guidance, and the promotion of enterprises.

The main elements required to foster the development of tourism in rural areas can be identified as follows: (1) the need for capacity building of farmers and rural tourism entrepreneurs; (2) the strengthening of public-private partnerships to support these landowners in matters such as legislation and the promotion of itineraries through travel agencies; (3) the willingness of farmers to engage in tourism in rural areas on their properties, with the aim of generating employment and income, given that, as previously noted, this involves the incorporation of activities that must be carefully organized and planned; and (4) improvements in legislation, both regarding tourism in rural areas and family farming, to facilitate farmers' access to this sector.

This research seeks to promote new opportunities for employment and income, particularly for family farming and small- and medium-scale rural producers, as a complementary activity, situating them within the framework of the so-called New Rural, characterized by its multiactivity and dynamism.

Similarly, it aims to foster awareness and commitment to environmental preservation, coupled with sustainable practices (such as water and energy conservation and the avoidance of environmentally harmful materials and products), alongside the potential adoption of Green Labels, which may further enhance profitability.

It is suggested that future research — employing distinct methodologies, focusing on other regions, or utilizing different datasets — be undertaken with the aim of examining tourism in rural areas and its significance for rural and regional development.

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