

Article

Sustainable Hunting as a Tourism Product in *Dehesa* Areas in Extremadura (Spain)

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Abstract: The *dehesa* is one of the main agricultural landscapes in the Extremadura region. It is currently undergoing a production crisis caused by changes in the market, including the abandonment of uses linked to its exploitation. This situation could lead to the disappearance of this unique landscape due to its anthropogenic nature. It is therefore necessary to develop alternative activities to improve its productive profitability, which could include sustainable hunting. The hunting literature recognizes the role it plays in environmental, economic, and social sustainability, with hunting tourism being one of the productive activities that generates the most wealth within the sector, where big game hunting is of great importance. In this scenario, the regions of Villuercas-Ibores-Jara and La Siberia have an ideal landscape for the development of this modality due to their physical characteristics. For this reason, this study carried out an analysis of the situation of hunting tourism in these areas through the dissemination of a questionnaire among the managers of rural accommodation in the study area. The responses recorded were processed using statistical techniques that allowed us to extract interesting results such as the importance of hunting as a tourist resource, with a large number of big game species living in these areas, the high presence of hunters in these lodgings during the hunting season, the role that hunting plays in environmental, economic, and social sustainability, and the need to create a specific tourist product that meets the needs of the demand of hunters.

Keywords: sustainable hunting; rural areas; *dehesa*; tourism; conservation

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1. Introduction

The *dehesa* is one of the main agricultural landscapes of the Autonomous Community of Extremadura, characterized by the combined use of its natural resources. There is a multitude of concepts about this type of landscape, considering the *Libro de la dehesa* as a reference in this work, since the archaic law of the *dehesa* of 1986 in Extremadura does not adjust to its current situation [1]. This book defines pastureland as “a system of livestock and/or hunting exploitation in which at least 50% of the surface area is occupied by pastureland with scattered adult acorn-producing trees and with a fraction of the area covered between 5% and 60%” [2].

As can be seen in this definition, livestock, agriculture, hunting, and forestry management are the main traditional uses. However, due to the changes that took place after the industrialization process in the market [3], their productive profitability has decreased notably, leading to the progressive abandonment of certain practices and the intensification of others. The latter is the case in some pastures dedicated fundamentally to livestock farming, which have seen the need to increase their stocking rate. In this scenario, the *dehesa* is immersed in a dangerous situation that could lead to the loss of its natural values or even to the total disappearance of this significant landscape [4,5]. Therefore, it is necessary to develop economic activities linked to the exploitation of natural resources that complement the agricultural income obtained in this type of landscape and promote its

conservation. Hunting tourism developed with sustainable criteria is shown as one of these possible approaches.

Hunting tourism can be understood as “that which encompasses the set of activities carried out by people who travel to a specific area, attracted by the hunting resource, with the aim of capturing game with sustainable criteria, using different techniques and means” ([6], p. 4). In spite of the current social movements that are against hunting activities due to concepts linked to morality and ethics, there is substantial scientific evidence confirming the importance of hunting for the environmental, social, and economic sustainability of the territories in which it is developed [7,8]. This definition of hunting tourism described by Rengifo [6] introduces the concept of sustainable hunting. Prior to this study, a reference can be found in the 2007 Wildlife and Natural Environment Convention on sustainable hunting, where it is determined that this activity, carried out at a pace that does not lead to a decrease in game species, contributes positively to their conservation. To that end, it is necessary to have legislation adapted to the specific casuistry of each territory, since an excess of restrictions could lead to social discontent, causing situations of conflict, and a lack of these regulations could lead to the disappearance of highly demanded hunting species [9,10]. In this scenario, Extremadura has specific regulations adapted to the current situation of the hunting species that inhabit this territory, although it is worth mentioning that there has been a notable decrease in those considered small game species in recent decades due to the reduction in some of their populations [11]. However, several authors have pointed out that hunting plays a fundamental role in the management of these species [12], in such a way that the reduction in some of these populations is motivated by other factors such as the intensification of agriculture or changes in land use [13,14].

Hunting not only plays a fundamental environmental role [15,16] but is also an economic resource of considerable importance for rural populations [17–19]. The Extremadura Hunting Federation estimated that, in the 2015/2016 hunting season, the expenses derived from hunting activity were around EUR 385 million in the autonomous community of Extremadura [20], a figure very similar to that estimated by the Regional Government of Extremadura [21] on the economic benefits derived from hunting activity on an annual basis. Within this expenditure, a large part is spent on hunting trips, generating a significant source of income in the places chosen as destinations [22]. In this respect, Extremadura is among the main Spanish regions chosen as a hunting destination [23] due to its environmental and landscape values, which allow the presence of species of notable interest. Among them, the existence of big game species is considered one of the main attractions for hunting tourists [24]. Despite the importance of hunting activity in Extremadura and the large presence of game species in this region, which make it an ideal place for the development of hunting tourism, there is little research on this subject, and there is a lack of official figures to determine the importance of hunting tourism in this territory. In this scenario, this study is presented as a novelty, as its main objective is to analyze the situation of hunting tourism in a territory with a great hunting tradition. At the same time, other secondary objectives were set out, such as the following:

- To determine the importance of the presence of hunters in rural accommodations;
- To define the incidence of hunting gastronomy in the study area, as well as its level of attractiveness among tourists;
- To find out the opinion of the managers of these lodgings on the role played by sustainable hunting at three levels: social, economic, and environmental;
- To highlight the needs that the managers of the rural lodges consider important for the development of sustainable hunting.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Area

The study area is geographically located in the Spanish regions of Siberia and Villuercas-Ibores-Jara (Figure 1). Specifically, it focuses on the rural tourist lodgings [25] located in both territories, which, in turn, are located at an optimum distance (5 km) from the big

game hunting areas located on the *dehesa* pastures present in the study area. The optimum distance is 5 km because it is estimated that lodges located at this distance have a greater influence on the hunting resource.

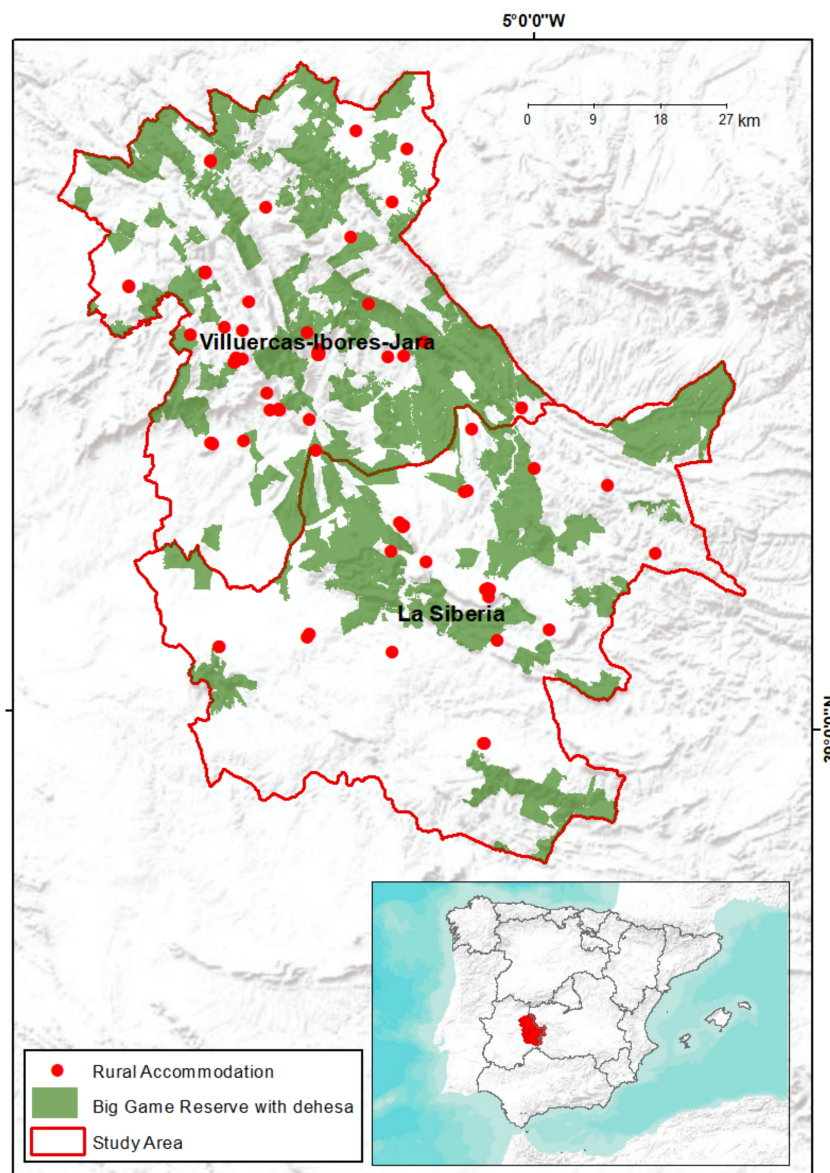


Figure 1. Study area.

The selection of this type of establishment over hotel and nonhotel lodging was motivated by the fact that, in the area analyzed, there is a strong relationship between rural lodging and hunters [26]. Hunters tend to choose them to the detriment of the other offers.

The counties that make up the study area have undoubted hunting value, with more than 85% of the total area dedicated to this practice (Figure 2).

According to the classification of hunting grounds dictated by Extremadura legislation [27], Figure 2 shows the different typologies existing in the study area. It also identifies a series of hunting grounds that can be grouped according to their management in two typologies: public or private. The first of these groups includes regional game preserves and regional game reserves. The regional preserves are intended to guarantee equal opportunities among hunters, with special attention to those from Extremadura, whereas the regional hunting reserves are characterized by their exceptional hunting characteristics, and their declaration responds to the objective of guaranteeing their conservation. In

this type of land, hunting practice is reduced to an annual public lottery carried out by the Regional Government of Extremadura. The number of permits granted in the last allocation [28] was 51 for national hunters and 202 for regional hunters. The study area includes the three regional hunting reserves existing in the Autonomous Community of Extremadura (Matallana, Cañamero, and Gargantilla) and one of the two regional hunting reserves (Cijara), confirming the great hunting singularity of these territories. To this must be added the large number of lands managed by gamekeepers, distinguishing between those that do not have a lucrative purpose and those that pursue an economic goal. The first of these cases includes the so-called social preserves. This type of land is managed by groups of hunters residing in a locality under the figure of local hunting societies. On the other hand, there are private hunting preserves, whose management is carried out by the owners or lessors of these lands with a clear objective: the economic exploitation of hunting resources. The private hunting preserves, in turn, respond to different subcategories that determine the form of exploitation of each one, being grouped in a general way as those dedicated to big game and small game.

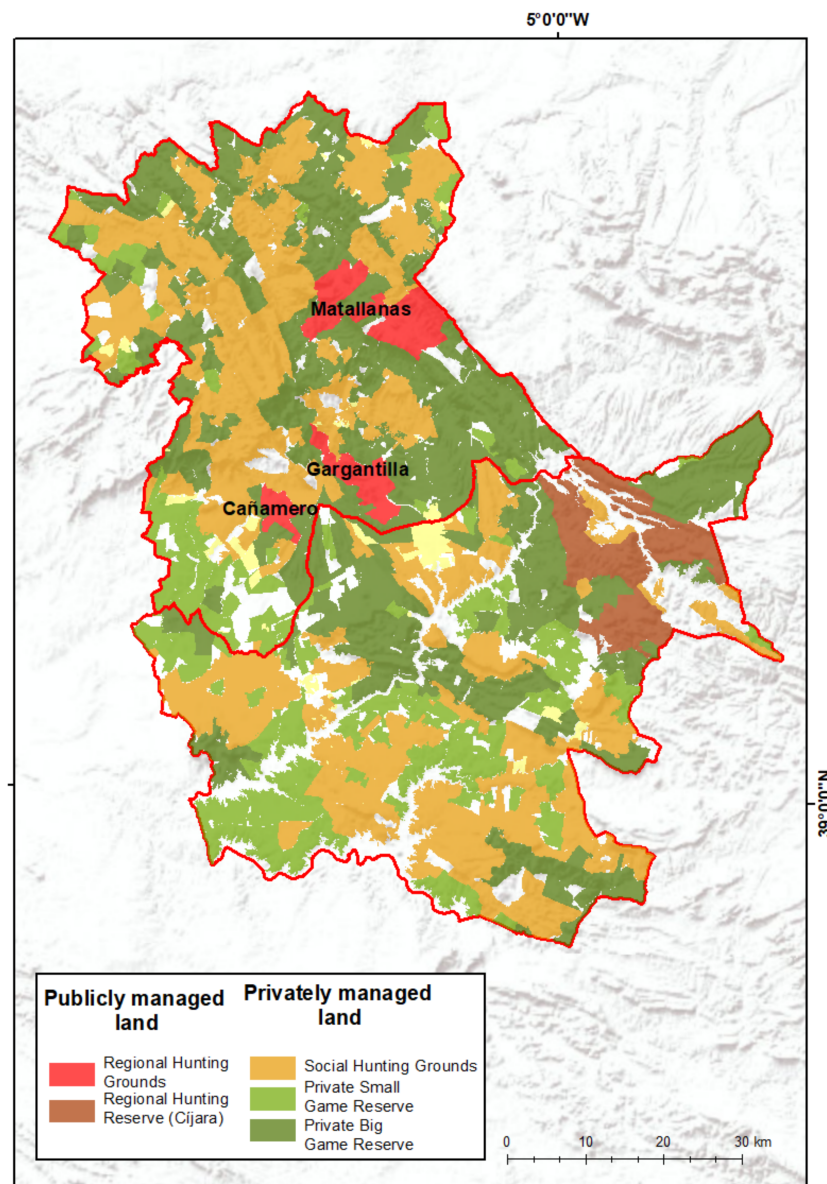


Figure 2. Hunting grounds in the study area.

Big game hunting reserves are very important in both counties, where the total area devoted to this practice amounts to 38% of the total area of the study site (Table 1). This figure far exceeds the regional average, where big game reserves cover 21.5% of the hunting grounds [29]. In this scenario, social hunting grounds occupy second position in the distribution of these hunting grounds. This type of area comprises slightly more than 36% of the total hunting area, with a very similar prominence in both counties. However, this situation does not occur in the case of private preserves dedicated to small game hunting, with the La Siberia region accounting for most of the land set aside for this practice within the study area (12.2%), whereas in the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara region, they account for only 4.9% of the total. These differences are mainly due to the physical conditions of each of these territories. As can be seen, the lands under public management represent a minimal part of the surface area dedicated to hunting in the regions (8%), although the existence of these lands gives the study area a greater hunting value due to their unique landscape features.

Table 1. Area devoted to each type of hunting land in the study area.

Comarca	Type of Hunting Ground	Surface Area (ha)	%
Villuercas-Ibores-Jara	Social	88,405	18.2
	Private minor	23,689	4.9
	Private major	101,401	20.9
	Regional preserves	17,005	3.5
La Siberia	Social	87,629	18.1
	Private minor	59,232	12.2
	Private major	85,971	17.7
	Regional reserves	22,024	4.5
Study area	Social	176,034	36.3
	Private minor	82,921	17.1
	Private major	187,372	38.6
	Regional preserves	17,005	3.5
	Regional reserves	22,024	4.5
Total		485,356	100.0

At the same time, the *dehesa* has an outstanding prominence among the reserves dedicated to big game hunting, as can be seen in Figure 3. It occupies 94.9% of the surface area of the reserves, although it has a lower incidence in the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara region.

The study area has an eminently rural character, which is why problems such as population loss [30], aging [31], low birth rates, and unemployment [32] can be observed in the same way as in other rural areas of the country. In this sense, it is necessary to implement initiatives that contribute to diversifying the local economy, allowing the generation of employment as well as the fixation of population. Hunting and, specifically, hunting tourism can act as complementary tools in the study area.

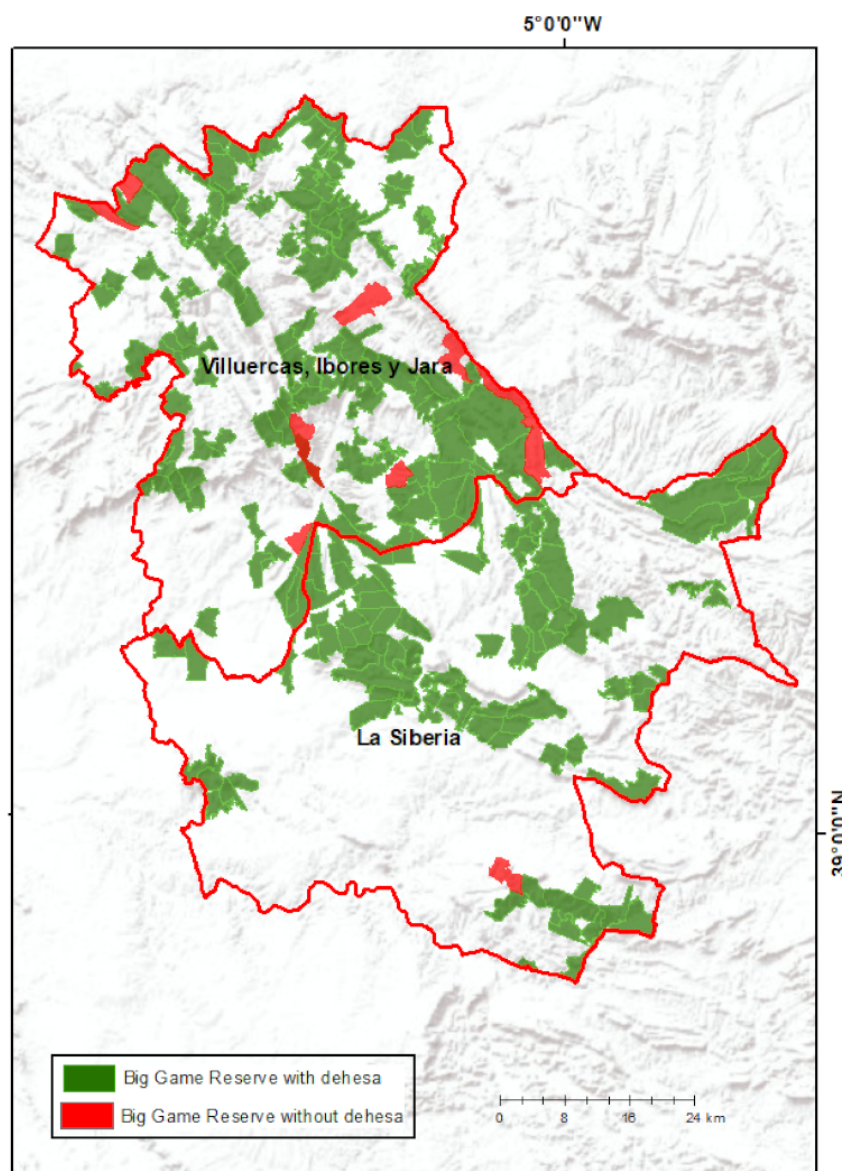


Figure 3. Big game hunting areas with pasture landscape.

2.2. Methodological Process, Sources of Information, and Techniques Used

The methodological process on which this research was based is shown in Figure 4 and consisted of the following phases:

1. Firstly, a review of the specific literature on hunting matters was carried out, enabling the theoretical framework of this research to be drawn up.
2. The second phase consisted of the design and development of an online questionnaire using the Google Forms platform, which consisted of a series of blocks aimed at achieving the main and secondary objectives of this work.
3. Thirdly, the questionnaire was disseminated through different communication channels among the managers of the rural accommodation located in the study area, which were located at a distance of 5 km from those big game reserves whose main landscape is the *dehesa*. The initial idea was to carry out this questionnaire online by disseminating it via email and WhatsApp. However, given the low participation received via email and WhatsApp, it was decided to change the method of dissemination and opt for individual phone calls to each of these landowners. This was the most effective way to obtain a statistically significant study sample.

4. Lastly, after recording a sufficient number of responses to carry out an analysis, these responses were entered into an Excel database and then processed using univariate and bivariate descriptive statistics techniques using the SPSS software.

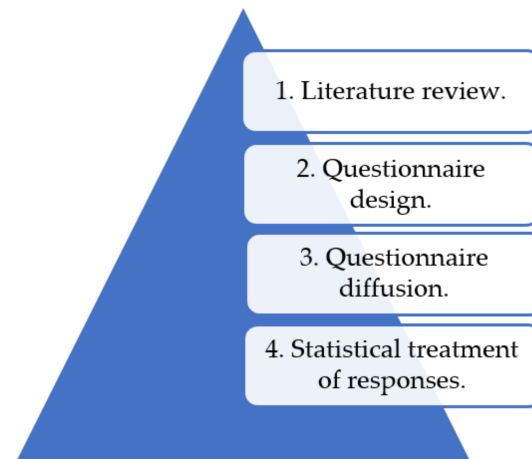


Figure 4. Phases of the methodological process.

The main source of information used in this research comes from the responses obtained after the dissemination of a questionnaire among the managers of rural tourist lodgings [25] located at a maximum distance of 5 km from the big game hunting areas with *dehesa* present in the study area. This questionnaire consisted of a series of questions described in Table 2, which made it possible to delimit the current situation of hunting tourism in the *dehesas* of the study area.

Table 2. Blocks and questions making up the questionnaire.

Block 1. Survey.
In what proportion do you think hunting can be considered a tourist product? Do you receive hunters during the hunting season (October/February)?
Block 2. Incidence of the hunter and characteristics of the trip.
What percentage of the total number of tourists you receive during the months of October through February do you think hunters occupy in your lodging? With whom does the hunter usually travel during his stay? What kind of complementary activities do hunters demand during their stay?
Block 2.1. Shortage of hunters.
What do you think is the reason for the shortage of hunters in your lodge? How do you think you could increase the number of hunters you receive at your lodge during the hunting season?
Block 3. Hunting gastronomy.
Do you offer catering services in your accommodation? Does the restaurant menu offer game meats? Rate from 1 to 5 the incidence of game meat among your customers. Do you sell typical products related to hunting gastronomy (e.g., deer or wild boar sausage)?
Block 4. Sustainability of hunting activities.
Block 4.1. Economic sustainability.
Do you believe that hunting contributes to the sustainability of the local economy? Indicate the ways in which you believe hunting contributes to the sustainability of the local economy.
Block 4.2. Environmental sustainability.
Do you consider that sustainable hunting contributes to environmental conservation? How do you think hunting can contribute to environmental conservation?

Table 2. Cont.

Block 4.3. Social sustainability.
Do you believe that hunting contributes to social sustainability? How do you see hunting contributing to social sustainability?
Block 5. Other issues.
Do you believe that public administrations collaborate in the development of hunting tourism? How do you think the presence of hunters affects your lodge? Are you in contact with the managers of the hunting grounds located in the vicinity of your municipality to advertise your lodging to hunting tourists? Would you like to see hunting tourism promoted in your municipality? Evaluate the importance of the aspects to which you believe the hunter attaches the most value when choosing a lodge.

This tool has been widely used in other research aimed at analyzing different aspects of hunting activity. An example of this is the work carried out by the Delibes team [33] in which it was determined that Spanish hunters value the quality of the red-legged partridge (*Alectoris Rufa*), as well as the ecological values of the estates where the different hunting days take place, due to their predisposition to pay more in exchange for fulfilling these conditions. On the other hand, Adom and Asante [34] used the survey to determine the opinion of the different agents interested in the management of wild game on the prohibition of this activity in different seasons. Another work that can be cited is that elaborated by Pan and Hadjisterkotis [35] on wild boar hunting and socioeconomic trends in northern Greece, using questionnaires to determine different aspects related to this hunting modality. These examples support the validity of this tool to evaluate different issues related to hunting.

On the other hand, the data sheet shown in Table 3 proves the statistical reliability of the data obtained, where, for a population of 54 active rural tourism lodgings located in the study area, a total of 44 responses were obtained. In this sense, it is worth mentioning that seven of these responses were negative, i.e., the managers of these lodgings expressed their opposition to the dissemination of any type of survey related to hunting activities. The total number of responses collected represented 81.5% of the rural lodgings located in the study area. Therefore, although the sampling error was initially 6.4% in the worst case, this representativeness gave greater validity to the data analyzed. On the other hand, it was very difficult to obtain such a large sample due to the small population of rural lodgings located in the study area, as well as the lack of interest on the part of some managers in responding to the survey. This situation meant that its dissemination was extended for 2 months (from 15 April to 15 June 2022) and, in this time, several rounds of emailing, WhatsApp, and phone calls were made, with the latter being the most effective.

Table 3. Technical details.

Survey	Hunting Tourism
Universe	54 (active rural tourism lodgings)
Sample size	44 (responses collected)
Sampling	Simple random
Confidence level	95%
Type of survey	Online questionnaire (Google Forms, https://forms.gle/aWikDi9Asoh46MUj9 accessed on 16 August 2022) disseminated by e-mail, WhatsApp, and phone calls.
Sampling error for the most unfavorable (pq = 50%) and most favorable (pq = 90%) scenarios	6.4%/3.9%
Date of completion	15 April through 15 June 2022

On the other hand, a series of secondary sources of information, mainly cartographic, was used to complement the analysis carried out in this study:

- National Geographic Institute of Spain: National Topographic Base at a scale of 1:100,000 [36] and Road Network [37];
- Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge of the Spanish Government: Nature Data Bank [38];
- Territorial System of Extremadura: big game preserves [39] and *dehesa* [40].

The alphanumeric information was processed using univariate and bivariate statistical techniques. In the first case, the frequency of response was calculated, as well as the percentage of this frequency with respect to the total. On the other hand, with respect to bivariate statistics, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to determine whether any of the study variables had a direct relationship with the choice of rural tourism lodging. In this sense, it seemed interesting to carry out a network analysis using geographic information systems in order to determine whether the distance in minutes could be a variable that interfered in any way with the choice of lodging. This tool was also used to determine the distribution of hunting species within the study area, generating specific cartography around this variable.

3. Results

3.1. The Hunter and Hunting in the Rural Lodgings of Villuercas-Ibores-Jara and La Siberia

In the specific bibliography on tourism, a multitude of definitions can be found that allude to the term “tourism resource.” The work prepared by Navarro [41] contained an analysis of the numerous conceptualizations that have been carried out. From this study, it can be extracted that a resource is that which has the capacity to attract visitors to a territory, generating a displacement toward the destination. On the basis of this definition, the managers of the rural lodgings that make up the sample of this study evaluated the capacity of hunting to attract visitors on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant that hunting could not be considered a tourist resource and 5 meant that hunting was a first-rate tourist resource. Table 4 shows the responses to this question, where it can be seen that hunting was considered a first-rate tourist resource for most of the sample in this study, whereas fewer than 20% considered this not to be the case.

Table 4. Hunting as a tourist resource.

Scale Value	Frequency of Response	Percentage (%)
1	6	13.6
2	2	4.5
3	6	13.6
4	7	15.9
5	16	36.5
Do not know/no answer	7	15.9
Total	44	100.0

This situation is not surprising given the incidence of hunting and hunters in this territory, with 6.6% of the study sample stating that they received this type of tourist during the hunting season. The managers of these lodgings described the high percentage that hunters occupied among the tourists they received during these months (Table 5); according to the data shown in Table 5, they accounted for more than 15.1% of the total demand in most cases. Furthermore, more than 34% of the managers indicated that the arrival of this type of tourist played a decisive role in the temporary durability of their establishment. These figures confirm the importance of hunting tourism in the study area, although it did not reach such a high incidence in some lodgings (36.0%).

The lodgings in which hunters made up a small or very small percentage of the total number of tourists they received during the months of the hunting season (October to February) stated that this reduced presence of hunters may be due to parameters such

as not being adapted to the needs of the hunter (40%) or to the fact that they stayed in establishments other than rural ones (60.0%). Meanwhile, the scarcity of game species in their territory, as well as the absence of catering services, were considered of little importance. On the other hand, in order to increase the incidence of this type of tourist, managers suggested that the creation of a tourism product around hunting activities (60.0%), as well as contacting the managers of hunting reserves located in their vicinity (50.0%), could be two key points. In this sense, both in the observations recorded online and in the telephone conversations held, it was detected that, in most of the cases in which no hunters were received or they covered a very small volume with respect to the total sample, the owners were completely unfamiliar with the hunting world. Thus, many of them did not know the needs in demand or the functioning of hunting activity (Table 6).

Table 5. Presence of hunters in the lodgings of the study area.

Hunter Incidence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very low (less than 5% of tourists)	4	16.0
Scarce (representing between 5.1% and 15.0% of tourists)	5	20.0
Moderate (representing between 15.1% and 30.0% of tourists)	9	36.0
Abundant (representing between 30.1% and 40.0% of tourists)	5	20.0
Very abundant (representing more than 40.0% of tourists)	2	8.0
Total	25	

Table 6. Reasons for the shortage of hunters.

Parameters that Can Determine the Scarcity of Hunters	Not Very Important		Important		Very Important		Do Not Know/No Answer	
Shortage of game species	7	70.0%	2	20.0%	0	0.0%	1	10.0%
Tourism supply not adapted to the needs in demand	5	50.0%	4	40.0%	1	10.0%	0	0.0%
Not offering catering services	8	80.0%	2	20.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Hunters stay in other types of accommodations (hotels)	4	40.0%	0	0.0%	6	60.0%	0	0.0%

On the other hand, the managers of the rural lodgings that did receive hunters determined the characteristics of their trips, highlighting among them the incidence of organized groups (40.0%) or trips with friends (68.0%) as opposed to traveling alone (24.0%), as a couple (20.0%), or with the family (16.0%). At the same time, 48% of these managers recognized that hunters carried out complementary activities other than hunting, including enjoyment of local cuisine (75.0%), hiking trails (58.3%), visits to protected natural areas (50.0%), activities that allow them to learn about the traditions and culture of the area (41.6%), bird watching (40.0%), and cultural visits to heritage sites (33.3%). The hunters' interest in carrying out these types of complementary activities reflect several issues:

- The hunter's capacity to generate economic benefits at the destination in sectors other than hunting;
- The hunter's interest in nature;
- The remarkable importance of gastronomy in these types of tourists.

The results obtained confirm the interest shown by hunting tourists in the enjoyment of the area's gastronomy. In view of these data, it is striking that only 18.9% of those surveyed offered a restaurant service, as well as the fact that none of them sold gastronomic products related to hunting. If it is also taken into account that the managers of those lodgings that had a restaurant and offered game meats on their menus evaluated these dishes as having an outstanding incidence among their hunter and nonhunter clients, giving them a value of 4 on a scale of 1 to 5 in 77% of cases and 5 in 33% of cases, the potential of this type of meat in the study area can be appreciated. On the other hand, among the species with the

greatest impact on the menu of these lodgings were those of big game (deer, wild boar, roe deer, etc.), which were included in 100% of the establishments offering this type of meat.

3.2. The Role of Hunting in Environmental, Economic, and Social Sustainability

The specific scientific literature on hunting shows the importance of hunting in environmental, economic, and social sustainability. In fact, a simple search by topic in the Web of Science using the concept “sustainability hunting” [42] yields a total of 6946 documents related to this topic. The main areas include environmental ecology, agriculture, business economics, engineering, and technological sciences.

The opinion of the managers of rural lodging located within 5 km of big game hunting areas of the *dehesa* pastures of the study area reinforces what is described in the specific bibliography (Table 7). Hunting was considered a tool that contributes to the sustainability of the local economy by more than 89% of the managers of the lodgings surveyed. Among the main issues in which they considered hunting to play a major role in the economy were the expenses derived from hunting trips (78.8%), the creation of jobs (60.6%), and, to a lesser extent, the expenses incurred by hunters in the purchase of weapons, ammunition, payment of taxes, etc., selected by 39.4% of the sample, together with their contribution to economic diversification in the rural environment, chosen by 27.3% of the respondents.

Table 7. Hunting and economic sustainability.

Role of Hunting in Economic Sustainability	Frequency	%
Job creation	20	60.6
Expenditure incurred by hunters in the purchase of weapons, ammunition, payment of fees, etc.	13	39.4
Spending generated from hunting trips: lodging, restaurants, complementary activities, etc.	26	78.8
Economic diversification of rural areas	9	27.3

The environmental management that sustainable hunting carries out in the conservation of landscapes and hunting species was another of the parameters recognized by 65.9% of the accommodation managers making up the study sample (Table 8). Among the main roles that hunting plays in environmental conservation, as described by the respondents, the control of species that do not have a natural predator in some territories stood out (75.9%), as well as the environmental management those hunters carry out on hunting grounds. On the other hand, albeit with a lower incidence among the opinions of rural lodging managers, the active role that hunting plays in pest control (44.8%) and the investment of the economy generated by hunting activity itself in tasks related to environmental conservation (41.8%) were highlighted. In addition, one of the respondents added to these the need for the existence of hunting activity for the control of populations that affect crops and livestock.

Table 8. Hunting and environmental sustainability.

Role of Hunting in Environmental Conservation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The environmental management carried out by hunters in the hunting grounds allows the conservation of these lands.	19	65.5
Hunting plays an active role in pest control.	13	44.8
Hunting management allows environmental conservation through the control of various species that have no natural predator in some territories.	22	75.9
The economy generated by hunting activities can be invested in actions aimed at environmental conservation.	12	41.8

Regarding the role that hunting plays in social sustainability, the percentage of managers who affirmed this question was reduced to 52.3% of the cases. Among the points that

the study sample identified as contributing to social sustainability, the role that the wealth generated by hunting can play in the creation of jobs and economic diversification, allowing the population to settle (82.6%), stood out. On the other hand, this activity also plays an important role in fostering relationships between people of different origins (56.5%), as well as in intergenerational relationships, allowing it to be considered a traditional activity that is generally passed down through time from parents to children and grandparents to grandchildren (52.2%).

3.3. Development of Hunting Tourism in the Study Area

3.3.1. Hunting Resources

The development of hunting tourism is conditioned by the presence of hunting species of interest to hunters that have the capacity to attract chasers due to their uniqueness and hunting values in a given territory. For this reason, and given that big game species are those of greatest interest to hunting tourists [24,43], it was considered necessary to carry out a specific analysis of the distribution of these species in the *dehesa* reserves located in the study area. In this sense, Figure 5 shows the undoubted hunting values present in the study area, where we can observe the great extension of the main big game species distributed throughout this territory, except in the case of the mountain goat (*Capra pyrenaica*). This species inhabits a small number of enclosed areas located in the northwest of the study area, in the area adjacent to the region of Campo-Arañuelo, as well as in the border area with the community of La Mancha, adjacent to Cabañeros National Park. The location of this species in the limits of the region of Campo-Arañuelo is striking, confirming the data provided by the Extremadura Hunting Federation [44] on the introduction of the *Capra pyrenaica* in some reserves of this territory, as stated in the different annual technical hunting plans. On the other hand, its presence in the La Siberia region, right along the border with the autonomous community of Castilla-La Mancha, is determined by the influence exerted by Cabañeros National Park, characterized by the existence of this species. The remainder of the game species studied are represented to a large extent throughout practically the entire study area. In the case of roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) and fallow deer (*Dama dama*), the region of Villuercas-Ibores-Jara has a greater population, probably as a consequence of the presence in this territory of the three regional reserves of Extremadura, which give great hunting value to the study area. In fact, the majority of the enclosed areas dedicated to big game hunting where both game species are found are located in the vicinity of these regional reserves, confirming the influence they exert on them. Lastly, deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) appear in practically all big game preserves in the study area. This situation is due to a large extent to the wide expansion of both species throughout Extremadura, among other reasons, due to the lack of a natural predator [21]. The existence of this large number of hunting resources confirms the potential of the study area for the development of this type of tourism.

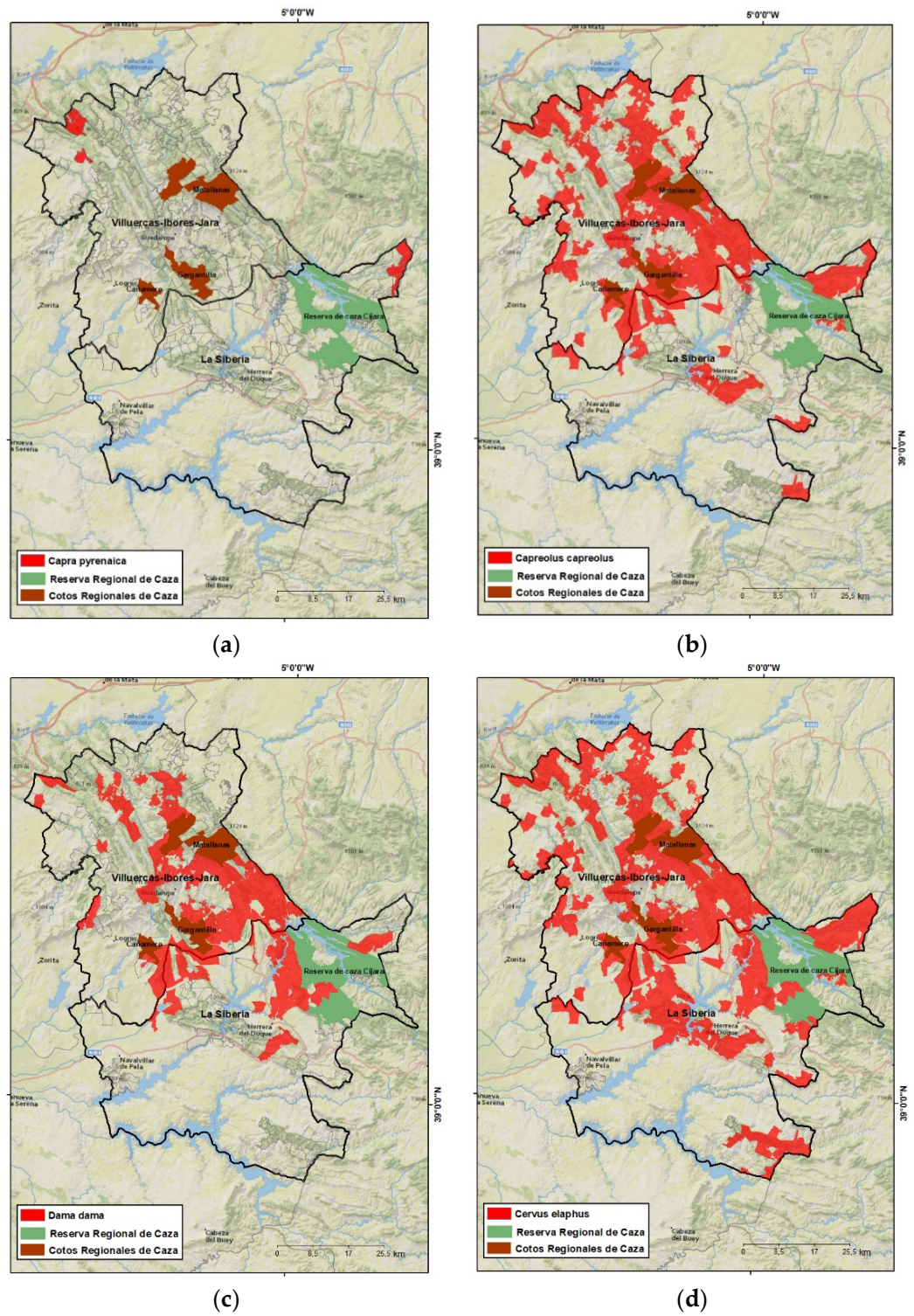
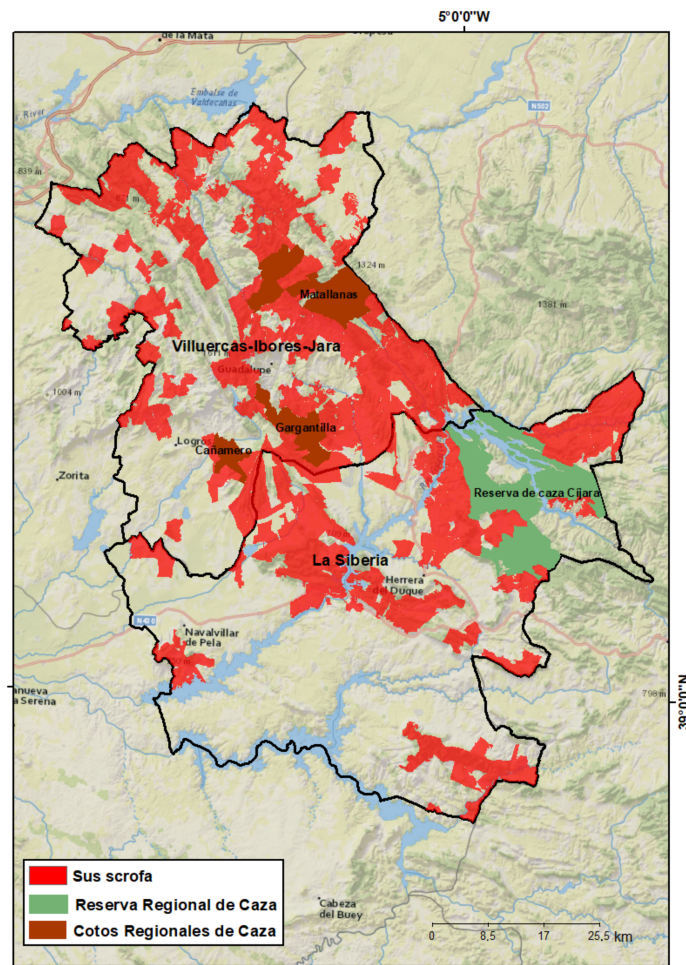


Figure 5. Cont.



(e)

Figure 5. Distribution of big game species in the study area: (a) *Capra pyrenaica*; (b) *Capreolus capreolus*; (c) *Dama dama*; (d) *Cervus elaphus*; (e) *Sus scrofa*.

3.3.2. Opinion of Rural Lodging Managers and Variables That Condition the Arrival of Hunters to an Establishment

Table 9 shows that the rural lodgings surveyed believed that the public administrations did not collaborate with the development of hunting tourism, despite the fact that the Regional Government of Extremadura considered it a market segment to be promoted in its latest plans [45,46]. In spite of this, 70.3% of those surveyed expressed interest in the development of this modality. Thus, the implementation of a common strategy between the public and private sectors through the creation of a specific tourism product for hunting tourism could contribute significantly to increasing the arrival of hunters and nonhunting companions. On the other hand, there is little dialogue between rural tourist lodgings and hunting preserve managers, with the results obtained showing that only 31.8% of the managers of these lodgings were in contact with the administrators of hunting grounds to promote the arrival of hunting tourists to their establishment.

Given the data described above, it seemed interesting to check which variables determined the number of hunters that the surveyed lodges received during the hunting season and to analyze whether the existing dialogue between lodges and big game hunting managers improved the presence of these hunters. For this purpose, a bivariate correlation was performed using Pearson's coefficient (Table 10). As can be seen, of the variables analyzed (number of vacancies, dialogue between managers, restaurant service, distance in minutes to the hunting ground, and number of hunters) the only one that had a significant correlation with the presence of hunters in the lodgings analyzed was the number of

vacancies. This may be due to the high incidence of trips with friends and in organized groups among the demand for hunting tourists as described by the respondents, a situation that may motivate the need to stay in larger establishments. On the other hand, there was a direct relationship among other variables: the incidence of offering catering services, dialogue with managers, and the number of vacancies. Thus, these variables increased at the same time, which implies that most of the lodgings that had catering services were those that offered the greatest number of vacancies, while these establishments were also the most connected with game managers. However, no significant correlation values were obtained for the remaining variables.

Table 9. Managers' opinions on the development of hunting tourism.

Ask	Reply	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you believe that public administrations collaborate in the development of hunting tourism?	Yes	13	29.5
	No	24	54.6
	Do not know/ No answer	7	15.9
Are you in contact with the managers of the hunting grounds located in the vicinity of your municipality to advertise your lodging to hunting tourists?	Yes	14	31.8
	No	23	52.3
	Do not know/ No answer	7	15.9

Table 10. Pearson correlation coefficients.

	Dialogue	Accommodations	Restaurant	Distance	Number of Hunters
Dialogue	1	0.429 *	0.120	−0.286	0.272
Places	0.429 *	1	0.540 **	−0.115	0.471 *
Restaurant	0.120	0.540 **	1	−0.162	0.156
Distance	−0.286	−0.115	−0.162	−1	0.113
No. of hunters	0.189	0.017	0.457	0.590	1
Significance level			0.05 */0.01 **		

On the other hand, different aspects were evaluated in which the lodging manager believed hunters attached greater importance when choosing an establishment. Table 11 shows the results obtained, where it can be seen how the managers believed that offering a restaurant service, as well as complementary activities for nonhunting companions, may be the most valued issues among hunting tourists when choosing a lodging. This situation highlights the need to create a specific tourism product that combines hunting, gastronomy, and complementary activities.

Table 11. Aspects that can determine the choice of an accommodation.

	Not Very Important		Important		Very Important	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Offer of other complementary activities	29	65.9	5	11.4	3	6.8
Accommodations adapted to hunting dogs and firearms	26	59.1	7	15.9	4	9.1
Catering service available	13	29.5	6	13.6	18	40.9
Proximity to your place of residence	28	63.6	6	13.6	3	6.8
Cost of lodging	28	63.6	4	9.1	5	11.4
Specific activities for nonhunting companions	15	34.1	16	36.4	6	13.6
Do not know/No answer		7			15.9	

4. Discussion

4.1. Hunting as a Tourist Resource

In the literature on tourism, there is an intense debate on the conceptualization of tourist resources and tourist attractions [47]. Thus, some authors use both terms interchangeably [48], whereas others, such as the World Tourism Organization, differentiate between the two concepts, considering a tourist resource to be an asset existing in a geographical area that is capable of attracting visitors, while referring to a tourist attraction as a resource that has already been transformed into a tourist product [49]. With this last reflection in mind, this article showed how hunting is considered a tourist resource by the respondents, demonstrating its great capacity to attract tourists to the study area. Moreover, in a good number of cases it becomes a necessary element to guarantee the sustainability of some rural lodgings. This affirmation can be seen in numerous studies, where hunting activity has been the protagonist. These include the work carried out by Rengifo [6,50], which demonstrated the capacity of big game species to attract tourists, as well as that carried out by Bauer and Herr [51], who dated the origin of the first international hunting trips to around the beginning of the 19th century, linked to the acquisition of trophies. They also showed that the ability to attract hunting tourists to a territory is determined by the availability of game species. In this sense, this article highlights the unquestionable attractiveness of the study area based on the responses recorded by the respondents, where the high incidence of hunters in relation to the total demand received during the hunting season can be seen in a large part of the lodgings. It also shows the high presence of big game species in the study area. These species were those identified by the specific bibliography on hunting as those that arouse the most interest among hunting tourists. An example of this is the work carried out by Rengifo [24], who showed how these species are the most attractive to international tourists, as well as that carried out by Coca [43], in which it was determined that hunting is one of the modalities with the greatest capacity for attraction among hunting tourists. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that, at present, hunting has been declared an asset of cultural interest in the Autonomous Community of Extremadura [52], confirming the singularity of hunting activity in this territory. Furthermore, the various reports of the Extremadura Hunting Federation [20,29,53] have shown that most of the big game species caught are hunted in this way.

4.2. The Role of Sustainable Hunting in Environmental, Economic, and Social Conservation

Hunting tourism can act as a complement to the economy of the rural areas in which it takes place. This role was acknowledged by the managers of the surveyed lodges, and the hunting literature corroborates the economic importance of hunting in other rural areas [54–56]. These economic benefits generated by hunting activities have, at the same time, significant connotations on a social level, contributing to the fixation of population in the areas where hunting takes place.

Hunting plays an important role in not only social and economic sustainability, but also environmental sustainability [57,58]. The managers of the rural lodges surveyed affirmed this role that hunting plays in environmental sustainability, showing how the management that hunters carry out in the hunting grounds themselves, as well as the activities related to the care and maintenance of game species, plays a very important role in the conservation of these grounds. Among these activities, Martín et al. [22] identified the installation of drinking and feeding troughs, predator control, and the establishment of catch limits as the most important.

This environmental role played by hunting in the study area has been observed in other *dehesa* areas. Examples include the work carried out by Paniza [59], in which he demonstrated how the replacement of hunting by other activities such as stockbreeding has led to an increase in the surface area of scrubland in these areas, or that carried out by Serrano-Montes et al. [60], who showed that hunting and stockbreeding are the main anthropic uses of the *dehesa*, playing a determining role in the conservation of these landscapes.

On the other hand, hunting also contributes to environmental conservation in landscapes other than the *dehesa* due, among other things, to the conservationist nature of the hunter. In this respect, the work of Lindsay et al. [61] showed the interest of hunting tourists in hunting in areas where this activity does not compromise conservation, whereas that carried out by Oltean and Gabor [62] identified as the main values of the hunter the love of nature and the enjoyment of the environment.

In addition to this conservationist profile of the hunter himself, the economic benefits generated by this activity can be used to carry out conservationist actions, as Alpert and Lewis demonstrated [63]. On the other hand, hunting can act as a means of managing some populations that have no natural predator in a territory [64].

4.3. Hunting Tourism

Despite the benefits of hunting in the study area on these three scales (economic, social, and environmental), those surveyed stated that there was little collaboration from the public administrations in the development of hunting tourism in the study area. In this sense, it has been possible to appreciate the interest of managers in its development and the creation of a specific product that revolves around hunting activity. To do this, it is necessary to know the characteristics and needs in demand. The work carried out by Martín et al. [24] showed the interest of hunting tourists in complementary activities other than hunting during their hunting trips, a situation which can also be seen in the study area. However, there are differences in terms of the characteristics of the trip between the general situation in Extremadura as a whole and that obtained for the study area. Specifically, these differences are related to the accompaniment of hunters on hunting trips, in such a way that the profile of the hunter throughout the region is characterized by trips where the nonhunting companion is of great importance, whereas in the study area, most hunting tourists travel in organized groups and with friends. In this sense, the creation of a tourism product that takes into account nonhunting companions (family or couple) could encourage the arrival of a greater number of people to the study area and, therefore, increase the economic benefits derived from these trips by involving sectors other than hunting. In this respect, the respondents noted the importance of offering complementary activities adapted to those accompanying hunters. All these data show the importance of hunting activity in the study area, as well as the need to create a specific tourist product adapted to the needs of hunting tourists. In this way, hunting could act as a complementary element in the agricultural income of the *dehesa* in addition to contributing to the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the study area.

5. Conclusions

This study enabled a series of conclusions to be drawn regarding the situation of hunting activity and its importance as a tourist segment in the study area. Firstly, it is worth highlighting the importance that the managers of tourist accommodation gave to hunting as a tourist resource. This situation is not surprising given the high presence of big game species in this territory, which attract a good number of hunters, determining, in some cases, the temporary sustainability of these lodgings. This situation is mainly due to the fact that the hunting season takes place at a time when there is a reduction in the arrival of other types of tourists, such as rural or cultural tourists. Despite the importance of hunting activity in this area, very few accommodations included hunting gastronomy among their products, although in those cases where it was present, there was a high incidence of this gastronomy among the tourists who chose these accommodations. On the other hand, this work made it possible to ascertain the opinion of tourism managers on the role played by hunting in environmental, social, and economic terms. Despite the prominence of hunting and its associated effects, those surveyed recognized that the public administration is not involved in the development of hunting tourism. In view of this scenario, this research highlights the needs expressed by the managers of tourist accommodations for the development of hunting tourism, allowing the data presented

in this research to be used by public administrations and private managers to set up an initiative aimed at implementing hunting tourism in these areas to allow this activity to serve as a complement to the agricultural income of the *dehesa* woodlands. At the same time, future lines of research can be established to contribute to the creation of a specific tourism product based on hunting. These could include an analysis of the characteristics of the hunters who visit these grassland areas.

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