

MASTER IN MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Academic Year 2025/2026

Carla Villagra Álvarez

**Integrating Agrobiotourism and Local Products into Natural
Protected Areas: A Case Study of the Montgrí, Medes Islands
and Baix Ter Natural Park**

FINAL MASTER PROJECT

Academic tutor prof. José Manuel Giménez Gómez



UNIVERSITAT ROVIRA I VIRGILI

Vila-seca

Date of presentation: June, 19, 2026

Abstract: *This master's thesis analyses the integration of agrotourism and local products as a tourism diversification strategy in the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park. Through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (park management, municipal officials, local development officers, and local producers), the study identifies perceptions, opportunities and barriers to the implementation of such a strategy in the park territory. The results demonstrate the existence of three different producer profiles based on their level of engagement. Practical recommendations include the creation of a multi-stakeholder governance structure, tax incentives, and the design of an agrotourism manual adapted to the different producer profiles.*

Keywords: *agrotourism, local products, natural protected areas, tourism diversification, sustainable tourism.*

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1. Introduction

The relationship between society and natural protected areas has evolved significantly over time. Initially, they were reserved exclusively for kings and nobles in medieval Europe (Eagles et al., 2002). However, their use became increasingly widespread, particularly with the advent of the Industrial Revolution (Meyer-Arendt, 2004) and the creation of the first national park in Yellowstone, USA, in 1872. From this point onwards, natural protected areas became public spaces closely linked to community development and the expansion of tourism (Eagles et al., 2002).

Given the key role that natural areas play in most modern tourist experiences (Muñoz, 2008), it is not surprising that various terms have emerged to describe the different types of tourism practised within these areas—such as nature tourism, ecotourism, active tourism, and rural tourism. All of these are closely linked to modern societies' desire to reconnect with oneself and with nature, and to escape from the urban lifestyle and settings (Bell et al., 2007). They are also linked to the particular emphasis modern societies place on caring for the body and mind (Rivera, 2015), as well as escaping from routine and stress in order to connect with simpler, more relaxed ways of life (Irshad, 2010).

In this context, various tourism trends have emerged seeking to reconcile these aspirations with the modern tourism industry, such as sustainable tourism, regenerative tourism, the desire to participate in authentic, genuine and experiential travel experiences, and the rise in the consumption of locally sourced products.

Furthermore, the paradigm shift in the use of natural protected areas—now viewed as spaces that must promote not only ecological sustainability, but also social and economic sustainability (Eagles et al., 2002)—has led to the use of these areas as settings in which to foster a regional artisanal socio-economy (Díaz-Rodríguez et al., 2023). It is within this context that the concept of agrobiotourism has emerged.

The concept of agrobiotourism, through its three constituent elements—agriculture, bioeconomy and tourism—aims to create tourist experiences in rural and semi-urban areas based in agriculture and in other primary sector activities such as livestock farming and fishing that through the lens of bioeconomy, technical and scientific advances, adopts sustainable production methods (Blanco & González, 2025).

Moreover, agrobiotourism shares with rural tourism and agrotourism the full range of benefits associated with these two forms of tourism (Blanco & González, 2025). These include the revitalisation of rural economies, the ability to stem rural depopulation, and the conservation of cultural and natural heritage (Liu et al., 2023; Saad, 2022). Furthermore, it fits in perfectly with the aforementioned traditional tourist forms and trends found in these territories.

Within this framework, local products—whether gastronomic or artisanal—are key to the development of agrobiotourism experiences. Understood as agrobioeconomic tourist resources, they form the cornerstone of these experiences, holding great potential for diversifying the tourism industry and the economy of these regions. However, for agrobiotourism and local products to reach their full potential, it is important that these tourism experiences are developed from an experiential and sensory-based tourism perspective (Kastenholz et al., 2021), employing storytelling techniques fostering an emotional connection with visitors (Korez-Vide, 2017).

In this context, the promotion of local products appears to be a legitimate diversification strategy for natural protected areas. In Catalonia, some natural parks, including the Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park, the Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park and the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, already provide visitors with information on local products produced within their areas of influence.

However, although there is a vast literature linking rural tourism, agrotourism and the promotion of local products to the socio-economic development of rural areas, there is little research examining how these concepts are implemented in natural protected areas. Furthermore, although the theoretical foundations of agrobiotourism have been established, particularly in Latin American contexts, where Blanco & González (2024) identified 44 projects as agrobiotourism initiatives in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Peru, there is a lack of research into how natural protected areas can benefit from the implementation of agrobiotourism experiences—perhaps due to the novelty of the concept itself.

In this regard, it is considered that the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, which is already working on the promotion of its local products under sustainability approaches, offers a unique opportunity to explore the practical applications of agrobiotourism and the promotion of local products as strategies for tourism diversification in the Mediterranean context, owing to its long-standing agricultural tradition and its proximity to existing tourist markets.

Therefore, the main objective of this master's thesis is to analyse in depth the perceptions, opportunities and barriers that various stakeholders attribute to the development of a tourism strategy based on agrobiotourism and local products as a tourism diversification strategy in the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park.

Deriving from this main objective, a series of secondary objectives have been identified: (1) to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding agrobiotourism, its relationship with nature tourism typologies, and its alignment with contemporary tourism trends including sustainability, regenerative tourism, authenticity, experiential travel, and the rise in the consumption of local products; (2) to examine the role of local gastronomic and artisanal products as agrobioeconomic tourist resources and their capacity to enhance destination authenticity and create memorable visitor experiences through experiential tourism and storytelling techniques; (3) to analyse the work being done in the specific context of the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park—including its natural values, agricultural traditions, and current tourism context—in relation to agrobiotourism and the development of local products; (4) to explore stakeholder perspectives on the opportunities and challenges associated with developing agrobiotourism in the park, including views from farmers, artisans, park managers, and local institutions; and (5) to develop recommendations for the practical implementation of agrobiotourism initiatives that respond to local conditions and contribute to sustainable tourism diversification in the park.

To this end, in *section 2*, this master's thesis presents a literature review that aims to lay the foundations for tourism in natural protected areas, including the main types of tourism and the trends that can be observed in these areas, alongside the role they play in the sustainable development of these regions. Next, the foundations of the agrobiotourism concept are laid, identifying the three components that make it up—agriculture, bioeconomy and tourism—whilst also delving into the contributions and intersections associated with agrobiotourism in relation to

the tourism industry. The role of local products as agrobioeconomic tourist resources and their potential for the diversification of natural protected areas is also examined.

After that, in *section 3*, the study methodology is presented. This is based on a qualitative study that primarily comprises in-depth interviews with various key stakeholders—whether they are producers, park managers or local institutions. It also includes a rating scale question quantifying certain variables of interest.

Next, in *section 4*, the case study itself is presented, including the context and specific characteristics of the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park region; an analysis of the tourism sector on which the area currently relies; and the identification of existing local products alongside any emerging initiatives that may be taking shape at present.

Subsequently, *section 5* presents the case study results along with an analysis of the conducted interviews, while *section 6* provides an analytical discussion of the findings themselves, including practical recommendations specifically tailored to meet local conditions.

Finally, the conclusions—presented in *section 7*—summarise the research and its main findings, whilst also seeking to address the objectives set out in this introduction. Meanwhile, *section 8* on “Future lines of research and limitations” aims to identify future areas of research that may help to expand the existing literature on this topic and to highlight the limitations encountered by the study itself.

2. Literature review

2.1 Tourism in natural protected areas

The relationship between society and protected natural areas has evolved significantly over time. Although the designation of such territories for exclusive use dates back over a thousand years ago—when medieval Western kings and nobles reserved them as private hunting and recreational grounds (Eagles et al., 2002)—the conceptualization of natural environments as tourist attractions emerged during the Industrial Revolution. This shift was shaped by the Romanticism movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the tradition among English and European aristocracies of “taking the waters” at spa towns, and a growing desire to escape the polluted, unhealthy conditions of early industrial cities (Meyer-Arendt, 2004).

The establishment of Yellowstone National Park in the United States in 1872 marked a turning point in this evolution. The role of protected areas as recreational spaces for the middle and upper classes of metropolitan societies was established, reflecting the transition from private or closed reserves to shared, publicly accessible areas intrinsically linked to community development and the expansion of tourism (Eagles et al., 2002). More recently, the rise of mass tourism between the 1950s and 1970s popularized sun and beach destinations—ultimately based on natural attractions—while contemporary trends such as outdoor sports and wildlife observation have further accentuated the role of tourism in natural environments (Meyer-Arendt, 2004).

Following this evolution and given the central role of natural spaces in most contemporary tourist experiences (Muñoz, 2008), it is unsurprising that various terms have emerged to classify the different types of tourism practiced within them. The most encompassing of them all, nature tourism, which works as an umbrella term for a wide range of subordinate categories (Moreno, 2022).

2.1.1 Definitions and typologies

The Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2026) defines *nature tourism* as “a type of tourism whose main motivation is to engage in recreational, leisure, interpretive, educational or sporting activities in the natural environment”. Martínez (2017) follows the same line of this definition describing nature tourism as that which is practised around natural habitats and their biodiversity, closely linked to protected natural areas such as natural parks or protected reserves. According to Bell et al. (2007), in a world increasingly concerned about the physical and mental health problems of its inhabitants, such as obesity or stress, nature tourism has gained significant importance as a way to reconnect with oneself and with nature, and to escape from urban settings and modern lifestyles. In turn, the increased use of natural spaces for recreational purposes has ignited a debate about the conservation of these spaces, raising the question of whether their conservation and use are indeed a paradox (Wolf et al., 2019), in turn giving importance to concepts such as ecotourism.

While the focus of nature tourism is on the place where it takes place, i.e., natural spaces, *ecotourism* differs from nature tourism in its special focus on the conservation of the natural environment and the integration of local communities into tourism practices with the aim of offering them socio-economic benefits. This specific approach can be noticed in the definition of the glossary of terms of the World Tourism Organisation (WTO, 2025). Understood as a branch of nature tourism, ecotourism is a “nature-based tourism activity in which the visitor's primary motivation is to observe, learn, discover, experience and appreciate biological and cultural diversity, with a responsible attitude, in order to protect the integrity of the ecosystem and promote the well-being of the local community”. The focus on the conservation of the natural environment and the integration of local communities into tourism practices is complemented by the idea that it should also contribute to environmental education and to ecological awareness (Vanegas, 2006).

Apart from ecotourism, nature tourism can take many other forms. *Active tourism*, sometimes referred to as adventure tourism, is a typology of tourism that can be also found under the umbrella of this tourist typology and which is defined by the WTO (2025) as: “a type of tourism that usually takes place in destinations with specific geographical features and landscapes that tends to be associated with physical activity, cultural exchange, interaction and closeness to nature”. As this definition suggests and as Araújo et al. (2012) point out, the specific focus for this typology of tourism is on the use of natural resources for sporting activities. This interest in sports activities combined with tourism is, according to Rivera (2015), an answer to the search for vacations that go beyond mere contemplation, in which tourists want to be an active subject and part of the trip, no longer content with just “seeing”. He also emphasises that the interest in active tourism is also a response to new social paradigms based on caring for the body and mind with a special focus on health, getting out of routine and stress, and seeking contact with nature.

Rural tourism, like ecotourism and active tourism, is also considered by many authors to be a sub-type of nature tourism. It is focused on the practice of tourist activities in natural, rural or agricultural areas with low population densities that should be dominated by agriculture, forestry and traditional ways of life (Solsona, 2006; WTO, 2025). It is similar to the other mentioned tourist typologies in the growing desire to escape urban and highly developed areas, the stress and monoculture of modern cities as well as the desire to be in contact with nature, to relieve stress and to connect with a simpler, calmer and more relaxed way of life (Irshad, 2010). In comparison, according to Irshad (2010), what sets rural tourism apart is the weariness towards traditional tourism products. This translates into well-educated tourists who seek unique and different

experiences that include contact with the local population, the heritage and traditions of a region, and the desire to experience the “countryside”.

These tourist typologies, *nature tourism* and its related subsectors—*ecotourism*, *active tourism*, and *rural tourism*—have become increasingly significant as types of tourism that take place in natural spaces in the contemporary tourism landscape. This growth is driven by a convergence of different factors. Tourists are seeking an escape from urban environments and a reconnection with both nature and traditional ways of life. This shift is also explained by a higher ecological awareness, a desire for more active and participatory travel experiences, and a search for authenticity. The convergence of these different factors is directly reflected in key tourism trends and concepts, including the principles of sustainability, regenerative tourism, the growing demand for authentic, genuine and experiential travel experiences, and the rising preference for locally sourced products.

2.1.2 Tourism trends in natural protected areas

One of the most accepted definitions of sustainability is that of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), which understands sustainability as a way to satisfy the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Given that tourism is a resource-intensive industry, it is not surprising that the concept of *sustainable tourism* emerged as a way of addressing the negative impacts of the sector while ensuring the long-term viability of tourist destinations and the needs of future generations. At first, sustainable tourism was only associated with specific forms of tourism such as nature tourism or ecotourism, specifically focused on environmental sustainability. Over time, and with the increase in the number of tourists, it became a trend that evolved from a niche concept to one used in all forms of tourism, including mass tourism (Lu & Nepal, 2009). The focus of sustainability shifted from solely protecting the environment to also focusing on the economic and social aspects of destinations. In this sense, Martínez (2017) cites the definition of sustainable tourism from the WTO (n.d.) as “a type of tourism that takes into account current and future economic, social and environmental impacts to meet the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”, specifying that apart from environmental sustainability, economic and socio-cultural sustainability also play an important role in the long-term viability of destinations.

However, sustainable tourism has its own limitations and has been criticized for its tendency towards a top-down approach. The criticism focuses on the fact that sustainable tourism seeks to manage social and environmental impacts to maximize the industry's economic benefits—shifting the focus from environmental and societal well-being to a strategic management that ensures the continued flow of tourism economic benefits (Bellato et al., 2023). The emphasis that sustainable tourism places on ensuring the economic benefits of tourism was the driving force behind the emergence of the concept of *regenerative tourism*, described as a: “transformational approach that aims to fulfil the potential of tourism places to flourish and create net positive effects through increasing the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems” (p. 1034). In this sense, regenerative tourism seeks a greater transformation than sustainable tourism, shifting the focus from the economic benefits to concentrating on how tourists can help to positively transform a destination, improving the quality of life of the communities that live there (Tham & Sharma, 2023), not only from a societal point of view but also from an environmental point of view.

Another concept that has risen strongly in the tourism industry and that is increasingly close to becoming an indispensable concept linked to all tourist experiences is *authenticity*. As mentioned,

tourists are seeking real, genuine, and meaningful experiences, moving away from traditional tourist products and pursuing unique tourist products instead. In this sense, Wang (1999) asserts that tourism in natural areas is one of the most authentic types of tourism, as contact with nature allows tourists not only to be in touch with the “real” world, but also with their true selves. For tourists, the concept of authenticity is linked to taking part in high-quality and valuable experiences (Moore et al., 2021) and it works as a major travel push factor, drawing a direct contrast with the concept of commodification and mass tourism (Terziyska, 2012). According to Rivera (2015), tourists value new, uncrowded tourist destinations that have not yet been spoiled, unlike traditional tourist products and mass destinations, which are known for their indiscriminate use of resources and the absence of long-term objectives. In this regard, Terziyska (2012) argues that authenticity can help destinations avoid these mistakes due to its inseparable link with the concept of sustainability, “both denote conformity with a community’s values, attitudes and traditions, and are sometimes also linked with two major aspects: continuity and audience” (p. 2, para. 2).

The concept of authenticity is not only related to the concept of sustainable tourism but can also be linked to the emerging trend of *experiential travel*. Dridea & Dobrotă (2024) define experiential travel as a way of traveling with purpose with the aim of having unique, authentic, and meaningful experiences; thereby, establishing a direct link between the two aforementioned concepts. The key to the rise of experiential travel, as stated by Rivera (2013), is on the role of the tourist, who is evolving from a passive consumer into an active protagonist in the creation of their own tourist experience, increasingly valuing sensory and emotional engagement. However, experiential travel extends beyond the desire for authenticity and the desire of having an active protagonist role in the tourist experience. As Dridea & Dobrotă (2024) note, it also interacts with sustainable tourism through a shared commitment to connecting travellers with local cultures, history, and traditions. This craving for connection, Seeler & Schänzel (2021) argue, emerges from a broader societal desire for genuine human interaction. By facilitating interaction with local communities, experiential travel serves to strengthen relationships not only with others but also with oneself, with nature, and with a place.

The boom in authentic experiences can be noticed in the consolidation of gastronomic tourism as one of the most successful types of experiential tourism, along with active and nature tourism (Dridea & Dobrotă, 2024). Gonda et al. (2021) also highlight the role that the search for authentic and unique experiences is playing in the rise of gastronomic tourism, which based on the consumption of local cuisine and *locally sourced products*, is acting as a symbol of authenticity and differentiation in an increasingly globalised world. Following the same line of thought, Mora (2020) claims that gastronomy has become a central pillar of the tourist experience. Tourists are increasingly drawn to local products that not only showcase a destination's authenticity and identity but also maintain a tangible connection to their cultural and geographical origins. Consequently, Mora (2020) argues that local gastronomic offerings should be actively promoted as key attractions, precisely because of their alignment with the principles of experiential tourism, which can help to make the tourist experience a more memorable event having a positive impact on tourist satisfaction (Noyola-Aguilar et al., 2024). In the opinion of Esponda et al. (2024), the connection between rural-natural areas and local gastronomy is more than evident, stating that, in particular, tourists with medium-high purchasing power value the quality and uniqueness of these products very highly.

2.1.3 The role of natural protected areas in sustainable tourism development

The emergence of certain tourism trends—*sustainable tourism, regenerative tourism, authenticity, experiential travel, and the rise of locally sourced products*—is shaping tourism experiences of the present and the future. Natural and rural areas play a key role in the development of these tourism trends and consequently, in the development of sustainable tourism.

Traditionally, the role of natural protected areas in sustainable development was primarily defined by their contribution to nature conservation and climate change mitigation (Díaz-Rodríguez et al., 2023). According to Mirkarimi and Arrowsmith (2017), these early protectionist policies emerged from a combination of factors: “a growing scientific exploration of nature, concerns over the destructive exploitation of natural resources, and a new literary focus on the relationship between humans and the environment” (p. 80).

However, this conventional model faced significant criticism. By isolating natural areas from the evolving social and economic realities of their surrounding regions, it created a division between conservation and development (Mirkarimi & Arrowsmith, 2017). A paradigm shift began in the 1970s and 1980s, when the concept of sustainable development started to integrate ecological goals with economic, cultural, and social considerations as fundamental elements of protected area management. This evolution has shaped contemporary practice: today, tourism planning and the development of protected areas must enhance economic opportunities, protect both natural and cultural heritage, and ensure the quality of life for all involved stakeholders (Eagles et al., 2002).

Modern approaches have built upon this integrated model. Recent research highlights the role of natural protected areas as catalysts for local culture, emphasizing the link between territory and cultural identity. Furthermore, these spaces are now seen as platforms to foster a regional, artisanal socio-economy (Díaz-Rodríguez et al., 2023). Saviano et al. (2018) extend this perspective, arguing that such a strategy offers a sustainable development model that benefits not only the protected area itself but also the entire surrounding territory and buffer areas. In this broader framework, the promotion of local cultural assets and agriculture becomes a key component in a strategy that genuinely integrates the three pillars of sustainability.

2.2 Agrobiotourism as a conceptual framework

The evolution of protected areas—not as isolated reserves, but as components of the social, cultural, and economic realities of the territory and their surroundings (Eagles et al., 2002)—has laid the foundations for the appearance of broader tourism models. The link between territory, cultural heritage, identity, and local economies has also demonstrated that conservation and community development are not exclusive but reinforcing (Díaz-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Saviano et al., 2018). It is within this context that a new tourism concept has emerged, one that seeks to link all these principles with agriculture, biodiversity, local products, and sustainable practices: agrobiotourism.

As a highly innovative concept, there is currently little literature examining the concept itself, its specific characteristics, the new contributions it is making to the tourism sector, the opportunities and barriers it faces, and what can be expected of it in the future. The pioneers and developers behind it are Blanco & González (2025) who define the concept on the *Agrobiotourism Manual: Designing tourism products that valorise bioeconomy practices* as “a type of tourism developed in rural and urban-rural areas, whose objective is the harmonious integration of biodiversity, agriculture, and its related activities with bioeconomy practices. This synergy gives rise to a new

tourism product, which generates a multifaceted experience for the tourist (educational, commercial, cultural, and recreational)” (p. 28).

Despite the novelty of the concept, reality goes far beyond academic literature. Blanco & González (2024) have already identified 44 projects classified as agrobiotourism initiatives across twelve Latin American countries—Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Peru—all of which participated in the inaugural agrobiotourism experiences competition held in 2023. The identified initiatives contain a diverse range of agricultural products and experiences, including the cultivation of crops such as citrus, carob, cocoa, coffee, tea, Andean grains, maize, spices, vanilla, and avocados, as well as viticulture (wine production) and hops cultivation (beer brewing). Other activities focus on livestock and artisanal products, including cheese and cured meats, honey, and interactions with farm animals. Many projects offer value-added visitor experiences, such as on-site restaurants at agroecological farms, guided trails through orchards, or the creation of handcrafted products like balms, shampoos, and soaps. Collectively, these diverse applications demonstrate agrobiotourism's versatility and its capacity to materialize in multitude forms across the tourism sector.

2.2.1 Integration of agriculture, bioeconomy, and tourism

To the better understanding of the agrobiotourism concept and its proper contextualization, it is proposed to differentiate the three terms that make it up—*agriculture*, *bioeconomy*, and *tourism*—according to the definitions proposed in the *Agrobiotourism Manual: Designing tourism products that valorise bioeconomy practices*.

Agriculture is understood as the cultivation of the land, an agricultural activity that uses the natural environment for the growth and extraction of crops, while also including livestock farming and agro-industrial processes that together form valorised practices for visitors and tourists (Blanco & González, 2025).

Bioeconomy, on the other hand, is understood from a technical-productive perspective. It seeks to take advantage of technical-scientific developments in biology, chemistry, physics, etc. to maximize the value of products derived from agriculture, forestry, livestock, fishing, etc. in the production of new bioproducts and bioservices intended not only for the agro-food industry, but also for other industries such as cosmetics, construction or tourism (Blanco & González, 2025).

Finally, *tourism* is presented as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon based on the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or professional reasons. These people, called travellers, can be tourists or day-trippers depending on whether they stay overnight at the destination. In the context of agrobiotourism, interesting tourist typologies are those carried out in rural and semi-urban areas (Blanco & González, 2025).

However, agrobiotourism emerges not from any single one of these concepts, but from the combination of them all; bringing together agricultural systems, tourism, and conservation efforts that work toward common sustainability goals. In this sense, sustainability goals in agriculture have gained urgency as a result of the sector's transformation. According to Campbell & López (2012), as populations and human settlements grew, agriculture shifted from being a practice closely connected to the environment and its natural cycles to an economic activity linked to a global system heavily reliant on pesticides and fertilisers, intensive farming and monocultures.

This new paradigm in the understanding of agriculture has nowadays led to a counter-movement, with populations calling for a reconnection between agriculture, society, the environment and ecology.

This counter-movement has also manifested within the economic sphere through the emergence of the bioeconomy concept. In this context, bioeconomy represents a paradigm shift from traditional economic models by integrating sustainability as a core principle and by establishing an optimal relationship between economic activity and sustainable development (Aguilar et al., 2019). The strategies employed to achieve it are varied, including promoting renewable energy, fostering rural development, conserving biodiversity, valorising local resources, or reducing water consumption and pollution. Furthermore, bioeconomy not only seeks to expand sustainable practices in economic science, but also to promote environmental education while also taking advantage of scientific knowledge and advances to achieve its environmental and economic goals (Rinn et al., 2023). This integration of science and sustainability is the key differentiator between agrotourism and agrobiotourism. While agrotourism traditionally focuses on experiencing rural life and agricultural activities, agrobiotourism further focuses on appreciating and understanding the scientific, technological and sustainable processes behind it.

As the third component of the agrobiotourism concept, the tourism sector has also responded to this broader societal shift—demanding to reconcile modern society with the environment—by embracing the principles of sustainable and regenerative tourism. According to Lorenzo & Morales (2015), the concept of sustainable tourism not only addresses the needs of tourists and host communities by reconciling human activity with the environment—thereby protecting and enhancing future opportunities—but also encouraging and promoting local development, which ultimately improves quality of life in these areas. The growing urgency of this societal demand can be observed in the rapid expansion of the concept, that over time, and in parallel with the increase in tourist numbers, has evolved from an alternative approach to a must-component in all forms of tourism, including mass tourism (Lu & Nepal, 2009).

Therefore, agrobiotourism is a logical response to this counter-movement seeking to reconcile modern human activities with the protection and appreciation of the environment. Through the three concepts that make it up—agriculture, bioeconomy and tourism—it aims to create tourist experiences in rural and semi-urban areas based in agriculture and in other primary sector activities such as livestock farming and fishing that through the lens of bioeconomy, technical and scientific advances, adopts sustainable production methods. In doing so, it perfectly aligns with the core principles of sustainable and regenerative tourism by protecting environments, supporting local development, and improving quality of life for host communities.

2.2.2 Agrobiotourism contributions and intersections with the tourism sector

Although some of the contributions of agrobiotourism have already been suggested, it is important to delve deeper into the benefits that this type of tourism can bring to the tourism sector. In general terms, tourism in rural areas has traditionally been linked to its ability to boost the economy by supporting product value chains and distributing economic benefits throughout the territory, while also contributing to curb rural exodus, and providing the population with economic and employment opportunities (Liu et al., 2023). However, Blanco & Riveros (2010) caution that the success of these initiatives is highly dependent on the guiding role of public and private entities. They should ensure these lead to genuine and sustainable development processes.

Traditionally, rural tourism has also been linked to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, since it promotes environmental protection and sustainable use of resources, while also promoting respect and appreciation for local cultures (Saad, 2022). Apart from Saad (2002), many other authors have also identified the link between natural and cultural heritage conservation. In this regard, Rodríguez (2019) states that “the natural and agricultural landscape encompasses ancestral practices, traditions, and artisanal production of goods that, as means of consumption in the rural community, constitute part of its culture and whose tourist use provides it with heritage value, thus enhancing the development of an interesting and diverse product in which natural elements and anthropological activity are related” (p. 63).

Focusing specifically on agrobiotourism practices, in their *Agrobiotourism Manual: Designing tourism products that valorise bioeconomy practices*, Blanco & González (2025) consolidate these perspectives by affirming that agrobiotourism can deliver the full range of benefits traditionally associated with rural tourism. These include stimulating local economies, strengthening product value chains, distributing economic benefits across the territory, promoting cultural and natural conservation, preventing rural exodus, fostering respect for traditions, and encouraging the sustainable use of resources.

However, agrobiotourism’s potential extends beyond these socio-cultural, economic, and ecological contributions. Blanco & González (2025) further argue that agrobiotourism practices are closely aligned with the principal tourism models operating in natural and rural environments. Specifically, agrobiotourism can be situated within the domain of nature tourism, as it inherently takes place in and draws value from these natural, rural and agricultural landscapes. At the same time, it falls under the umbrella of rural tourism, given its intrinsic link with agriculture, primary sector practices, and the appreciation of traditional ways of life in sparsely populated areas. Moreover, agrobiotourism shares key principles with ecotourism, particularly through its emphasis on sustainability and its commitment to ensuring that tourism activities actively contribute to environmental stewardship, cultural interpretation, and education, all while also offering diversification alternatives for active tourists.

Blanco & González (2025) observe that agrobiotourism not only aligns with the principal tourism models operating in natural and rural environments, but also with broader tourism trends, including sustainable tourism and regenerative tourism. Its commitment with environmental protection along with long-term sociocultural development and sustainable economic growth strongly resonates with the core foundations of sustainable tourism. At the same time, agrobiotourism practices can be intrinsically linked to the principles of regenerative tourism due to their shared objectives. They both seek to create net positive effects, actively contributing to environmentally sustainable practices and improving the quality of life in host communities through the constructive engagement of tourists.

The connection between agrobiotourism and the emerging trends of authenticity, experiential travel, and the rise of locally sourced products is also evident. Agrobiotourism practices offer unique, genuine, and meaningful experiences that enhance the quality and perceived value of these specific tourism offerings (Blanco & González, 2025). These experiences are often based on the active participation of tourists, perfectly aligning with the concept of experiential travel, and positioning the tourist in an active protagonist role (Rivera, 2013). The central role of local products in agrobiotourism experiences further responds to the contemporary tourists' desire to consume items that showcase a destination's authenticity and identity, maintaining a tangible connection to their cultural and geographical origins (Mora, 2020).

2.2.3 Local products as agrobioeconomic tourist resources

Local products, encompassing both gastronomic and artisanal goods, are fundamental to the implementation of agrobotourism practices. As the primary outputs of this type of tourist experience, they form the basis of the agrobotourism offering while simultaneously embodying the authenticity and territorial identity of their place of origin.

In alignment with this perspective, Bessi re (2001) states that gastronomy and local products serve as expressions of the territory, functioning as identifying elements of the region, its traditions and its cultural heritage, thereby acting as an emblem of community identity. Within this framework, products that come from the land and their traditional culinary practices act as standard-bearers not only of local expertise but also of rural expertise, forming the foundation upon which agrobotourism is built. Complementing this view, Williams (2001) asserts that the relationship between territory and product increases and enhances the value of local resources, which must ensure specific quality levels and explicitly articulate their connection to regional identity through branding strategies in order to achieve success. Extending this line of reasoning, Vargas-Peralvo et al. (2025) argue that the success of these models also depends on promoting a culture of innovation within productive and host communities, enabling the transformation of rural resources into meaningful tourist experiences. In particular, they emphasize agro-industrial innovation as a means of integrating elements of local production into differentiated and sustainable tourism offerings—an approach consistent with the principles of bioeconomy and, more broadly, with the overall concept of agrobotourism.

While the role of local gastronomic products in agrobotourism experiences is undeniable, Fern ndez et al. (2023) offer the perspective on artisanal products. These goods, often crafted using knowledge passed down from generation to generation—a characteristic that confers them significant added value—serve as distinguishing features of a region and have proven to be powerful instruments for cultural preservation, in some cases even reviving traditional activities already lost. According to Blanco & Gonz lez (2025), for such artisanal products to be considered agrobioeconomic tourist resources, they must necessarily derive from the natural environment, encompassing examples such as wool production, ceramics, or the handcrafting of aromatic herbs soaps.

Extending the reasoning of Fern ndez et al. (2023), the authors further contend that artisanal products have also proven to be useful tools for the economic revitalization of rural areas by promoting a more efficient use of materials alongside environmentally conscious approaches, a principle that aligns closely with the philosophical foundations of agrobotourism. Furthermore, S nchez & Galeano (2018) add that traditional artisanal products constitute cultural treasures that embody a region's traditions, customs, and creativity, also reflecting its authenticity—a recognition consistent with UNESCO's designation of such practices as Intangible Cultural Heritage under the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Therefore, it can be argued that both gastronomic and artisanal products constitute the pillars upon which agrobotourism is built and can be considered agrobioeconomic tourist resources, as they address the key principles of agrobotourism theory by contributing to the creation of authentic, meaningful, and territorially grounded tourist experiences that foster regional identity, preserve natural and cultural heritage, and encourage agro-industrial innovation—all while aligning with the principles of sustainability development and stimulating economic growth within these areas.

2.2.4 Local products as diversification tools in natural protected areas

Local products, understood as agrobioeconomic tourism resources, have a great potential to diversify the tourism offerings in natural areas of high biological and scenic value—specifically, in natural protected areas combining biological richness, agricultural tradition and tourism potential (Yllatopa et al., 2025).

As Ojeda & Kallurzen (1990) note, initially natural protected areas were conceived to exclude human presence, including human settlements, agriculture, and forestry activities. However, over time this perspective shifted and these spaces were perceived as sites for environmental education and social functions where local populations, traditional livelihoods, agriculture, and other primary sector activities were no longer excluded but instead became a source of interest. This shift is already reflected in specific initiatives undertaken by several natural parks in Catalonia. For instance, the Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park promotes local food producers and artisans through specific brochures posted on its website (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026); the Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park has joined a recent initiative promoted by the Generalitat de Catalunya, the "Made in the Park" brand, to support farmers and livestock breeders whose practices align with park conservation goals (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026); and the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park has published a list of local producers encouraging the purchase of locally sourced products (Parc Natural del Montgrí, les Illes Medes i el Baix Ter, n.d.) while also working on joining the already mentioned "Made in the Park" brand. Within this context, agrobiotourism—combining sustainable practices, biodiversity conservation, fragile ecosystems, agricultural traditions, and tourism potential—emerges as a legitimate strategy for diversifying the tourism offerings in such natural areas, where offerings have traditionally been limited to rural, eco, or active tourism.

A growing body of literature supports the role of local products in this diversification strategy. Csurgó et al. (2019) state that local gastronomic products are particularly important in rural areas seeking to restructure and diversify their economies, as they act as symbols of authenticity by reflecting a region's unique identity and distinguishing it from others. The economic and touristic potential of gastronomy is also discussed by Da Mota et al. (2024), who argue that gastronomy is a key element in tourism diversification, particularly in rural regions seeking economic revitalization. Their special contribution lies in noting that these products create synergies with other tourism modalities, thereby enhancing a region's overall appeal. Complementing this perspective, Orboi (2012) addresses the role of non-gastronomic local products, arguing that primary sector resources—such as wool, clay, wood, and ceramics—along with handicrafts, should be integrated alongside gastronomic offerings in the tourism diversification strategies of agro-rural and natural areas.

Beyond their cultural value, local products also appeal to tourists through their highly appreciated sensory qualities (Csurgó et al., 2019). Extending this reasoning, several authors emphasize the experiential value of these products. Kastenholz et al. (2021) point out that, due to their richness and diversity, local products have great potential to develop sensory experiences that enrich the visitor's tourist experience in rural and natural areas. Similarly, Agapito et al. (2016) emphasize that unique sensory experiences are perceived as premium products that can help a destination position itself. Korez-Vide (2017) advances this argument by arguing that experiential or sensory-based tourism—grounded in the active development of activities such as gastronomy or crafts—should employ storytelling techniques to market destinations successfully, as tourists do not only seek to buy a product but the story behind it. Storytelling techniques, understood as the ability to create narratives around a product or experience immersing the audience in a world built around

history, culture, nature, and local people, are closely linked to the concept of authenticity and the creation of memorable experiences (Vu, 2022)—elements intrinsically connected to the agrobiotourism theory.

Therefore, the strategic use of locally sourced products—whether gastronomic or artisanal—constitutes a promising approach to diversifying tourism in natural protected areas and their surrounding buffer areas. This strategy aligns closely with the principles of agrobiotourism, which emphasizes the integration of agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and tourism development. To maximize its effectiveness, the approach should prioritize the creation of experiential and sensory-based tourist experiences, framed through storytelling techniques enhancing their emotional impact and cultural significance. In doing so, destinations can not only strengthen their appeal but also achieve deeper visitor engagement rooted in authenticity and place-based identity.

2.3 Gaps in the literature

Previous literature demonstrates that the concept and use of protected natural areas has evolved considerably over time. Initially conceived as protectionist and conservationist closed spaces, these areas had been gradually opened to the public (Eagles et al., 2002; Mirkarimi and Arrowsmith, 2017), enabling the enjoyment and recreational use of society, with a special focus on the development of tourism activities.

This evolution has led to the emergence of various tourism-related terms, including *nature tourism*, *ecotourism*, *active tourism* and *rural tourism*, all of which are closely linked to certain tourism trends such as *sustainable tourism*, *regenerative tourism*, the search for *authentic experiences* through the lens of *experiential tourism*, and the growing demand for the consumption of *locally sourced products*.

Together, these trends reflect the aspirations of a society seeking to reconnect with both oneself and with nature, escaping from urban spaces and lifestyles (Bell et al., 2007). Additionally, the movement is connected to the particular emphasis modern societies place on caring for the body and mind (Rivera, 2015), as well as escaping from routine and stress to connect with simpler, more relaxed ways of life (Irshad, 2010).

It is within this context—where natural protected areas are understood as open spaces that must promote not only ecological, but also social and economic sustainability (Eagles et al., 2002), and in which regional artisanal socio-economies are growing (Díaz-Rodríguez et al., 2023)—that the concept of agrobiotourism and the consumption of local products has gained significant importance.

Nevertheless, while a vast body of literature links rural tourism, agrotourism and the promotion of local products to the socio-economic development of rural areas, there is a lack of empirical case studies examining how agrobiotourism and local products, understood as agrobioeconomic tourist resources, are actually implemented within natural protected areas and their buffer areas. Furthermore, there is limited case-based evidence demonstrating the practical challenges, opportunities, and outcomes of developing agrobiotourism initiatives and promoting local products as diversification strategies in these specific contexts.

In this regard, the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, which combines natural protected areas, agricultural traditions, and proximity to tourism markets, represents an ideal setting to study agrobiotourism development outside the Latin American context, where most of the literature and its implications originates. Moreover, it offers an opportunity to study how these

initiatives can contribute to diversifying the tourist offer in ways that align with sustainability, regenerative principles, and contemporary tourism trends in the Mediterranean context.

3. Methodology

Research approach, design and context

The following master's thesis is based on a predominantly qualitative and interpretive study, complemented by a descriptive quantitative component (rating scale question). The qualitative approach was chosen to efficiently address the main research objective:

to analyse in depth the perceptions, opportunities and barriers that various stakeholders attribute to the development of a tourism strategy based on agrotourism and local products as a tourism diversification strategy in the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park.

The research is based on a unique case study—the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park—due to its long-standing agricultural tradition, its proximity to existing tourist markets, and the effort it is currently making to promote its local products under sustainability approaches; which offers a unique opportunity to explore the practical applications of agrotourism and the promotion of local products as strategies for tourism diversification in the Mediterranean context.

Participant selection

Participant selection was carried out through purposive sampling, seeking to include different perspectives on the same phenomenon and allowing the triangulation of information between institutional, technical and productive points of view. The following stakeholders' groups were established:

- park management: Agricultural engineer of the Natural Park (n=1)
- local development officers: Local Development and Employment Promoter of the municipalities within the park's area (n=1)
- municipal tourism officials: Heads of Tourism Departments of the most touristic municipalities located within the park's area (n=3)
- local producers: 2 olive oil producers, 1 wine producer, 1 aromatic herb producer, 1 rice producer, 1 artisanal fisherman, and 1 craftsman (n=7)

The agronomist's perspective provides valuable insights into the development of agrotourism practices from an economic, productive, and environmental point of view. In contrast, the local development and employment promoter contributes to a perspective focused on economic revitalization, while the heads of tourism departments offer a tourism-focused perspective. Finally, producers contribute firsthand accounts of their daily production activities as well as the agrotourism experiences in which they participate. To ensure the sample was as representative as possible, an effort was made to include a diverse range of production profiles—ranging from gastronomic producers to fishermen and craftspeople.

The final sample consisted of 12 participants, which was considered sufficient to achieve information saturation given the participants' expert territorial knowledge. To confirm their

participation, they were all contacted by email or telephone call in which the objectives and purpose of the research were presented.

Data collection techniques and instruments

The primary research method was semi-structured interviews, complemented by a numerical rating scale question (1 to 5) integrated into the interviews themselves. The selected research method allowed for the structuring of questions into thematic blocks, thus facilitating subsequent data analysis and comparison of discourse among the different interviewees. The format also enabled participants to express themselves in depth, providing examples and personal reflections.

Four versions of the same interview were designed, one for each of the identified stakeholder groups. All interviews shared a common structure across the different thematic groups, although questions were adapted to the specific needs of each group. The established thematic blocks resulted in the following classification:

1. Rating scale question: Current presence of local products in the tourism offer
2. Context, role, and economic activity
3. Visitors, demand, and opportunities
4. Barriers, coordination, and governance
5. Theoretical concepts (agrotourism, identity, and diversification)
6. Future vision and recommendations

Each of the thematic blocks included open-ended questions designed to promote reflection, the sharing of personal and professional experiences, and illustrative examples adding significant depth to the conducted analysis. In contrast, the rating scale question (1 to 5), *"On a scale from 1 to 5, how would you rate the current presence of local products in the park's/municipalities' tourism offer?"*, aims to establish an initial assessment upon which to base the responses to the open-ended questions.

Data collection procedure

The interviews were conducted between the end of April and mid-May 2026, offering participants the option of conducting them face-to-face at their workplace (park offices, town halls, tourism offices, and production centres) or via video call. The average duration of the interviews was 41 minutes, with the shortest interview lasting 25 minutes and the longest lasting 1 hour and 4 minutes.

All in-person interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription and data analysis while video-call interviews were recorded in both video and audio for the same purpose. Notes were also taken during the interviews, highlighting the most interesting points and keywords that the interviewees developed. All participants were informed of the recording and gave their explicit consent to be recorded.

Transcriptions were generated using AI tools specifically designed for this purpose, and the data analysis for each interview was performed either on the same day or within a maximum of two

days to ensure that the specificities, sensations, and conversations of each interview remained clear in the researcher's mind.

Data analysis strategy

The data analysis differed depending on whether the questions were open-ended or rating scale questions.

Open-ended questions

First, the researcher became familiar with the interview data by carefully reading the transcripts. Second, key words, ideas, and concepts were identified. These key words, ideas, and concepts allowed for the creation of the different analytical blocks presented in *section 5* (Results), which turned out to be similar to the initially planned thematic blocks. Finally, the results for each of these blocks were written up for the different identified subsections, conducting a critical analysis of the information, including comparisons, divergences, similarities, and specificities between the different participants.

At first, before conducting the interviews, a deductive process based on the theoretical framework was used to define the thematic blocks. However, once the interviews were completed, an inductive process was used to further define them based on the participants' discourse. The data analysis was carried out manually using tables and spreadsheets in Excel format.

Rating scale question

The rating scale question was specifically analysed using descriptive statistics, including the calculation of the mean, median, and standard deviation for the public and private sector sample, and for the overall sample. Due to the small sample size, individual participant scores were also included. This information served a contextual purpose, indicating the starting point for the presence of local products in the region, not being intended for statistical use.

Ethical considerations

Before each interview, when contacting participants by email or telephone call, they were informed of the objectives and purpose of the study, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Additionally, they were asked for permission to record the interviews in audio (face-to-face interviews) or video (video call). They were also informed that the recordings would be deleted once the final master's thesis was submitted. Moreover, they were notified that the participation in this study should not have any negative consequences for their professional career or personal life and that all opinions/reflections expressed during the interviews would be treated in an anonymous way.

In order to achieve anonymity, participants were divided into two groups: on the one hand, administration or public sector (n=5) and on the other, local producers or private sector (n=7). In addition, to facilitate the construction of the discourse and the presentation of the data, codes were generated for each participant: *executive 1*, *executive 2*, *executive 3*, *executive 4* and *executive 5* (public sector); and *producer 1*, *producer 2*, *producer 3*, *producer 4*, *producer 5*, *producer 6* and *producer 7* (private sector).

4. Case study presentation: Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park

Before presenting the research findings, the following section introduces the case study, including the context and specific characteristics of the Montgrí, Medes Islands, and Baix Ter Natural Park region; an analysis of the tourism sector on which the area currently relies; and the identification of existing local products alongside any emerging initiatives that may be taking shape at present. The objective is to establish a solid framework for the findings, which will be presented in *Section 5*.

4.1 Context, history and characteristics

The Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park is a protected natural area in the Costa Brava region (Alt and Baix Empordà). It was declared a Natural Park in 2010 (Law 15/2010 of May 28); yet, its history dates back to 1969, when the Spanish Federation of Underwater Activities proposed the creation of an underwater park in the Medes Islands. However, the first laws protecting the area did not appear until the 1980s, when the Institute of Catalan Studies commissioned a collaborative study on the natural systems of the Medes Islands. On November 25, 1983, fishing activities and the extraction of marine resources were prohibited. This protection was expanded by Law 19/1990 of December 10 on the conservation of fauna and flora of the Medes Islands' seabed. On January 10, 2000, the Government of Catalonia adopted the agreement to approve the Special Plan for the Definitive Delimitation of the Montgrí PEIN Area (Plan of Areas of Natural Interest). In December 2001, the seabed was included on the main list of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance. In September 2006, a Special Protection Area for Birds was designated along with the proposal for Site of Community Importance, being included in the Natura 2000 network. Finally, the Natural Park was created in May 2010, thus culminating a process of several decades of protection and conservation (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026).

Its surface area includes 8.192 hectares, of which 2.037 are marine (23%) and 6.155 terrestrial (77%) (Tourist Office of l'Estartit & Torroella de Montgrí Town Hall, n.d.). The hectares are distributed among different protective figures including: the Integral Natural Reserve of the Medes Islands (corresponding to the emerged part of the islands, in which access is only permitted with authorization—whether to carry out scientific research work, protected space management activities, or maintenance of the lighthouse), the Partial Marine Nature Reserve (strictly protected maritime area in which fishing and exploitation of maritime resources are prohibited but in which recreational aquatic activities are permitted), the Peripheral Protection Zone of the Partial Marine Nature Reserve (buffer area of the Medes Islands Partial Marine Nature Reserve), and the Partial Reserve of the Aiguamolls del Baix Ter (including the lagoons and marshlands of the Ter Vell, the Pletera, bassa de Fra Ramon and basses d'en Coll) (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026; Tourist Office of l'Estartit & Torroella de Montgrí Town Hall, n.d.). Additionally, agricultural areas—mainly located on the slopes of the Montgrí massif and in the plain's areas near the Partial Reserve of the Aiguamolls del Baix Ter—were also identified. The purpose was to give preference to activities and actions promoting agricultural use while at the same time making such use compatible with the conservation of the natural heritage (Tourist Office of l'Estartit & Torroella de Montgrí Town Hall, n.d.).

Additionally, the Natural Park is constituted as a whole by three distinct areas, which correspond to the different territorial areas mentioned in its name: the Montgrí massif, the maritime zone of the coast and the Medes Islands, and the plain and wetlands of the mouth of the Ter River

(Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, n.d.). Traditionally, the Montgrí Massif—which includes the Ullà, the Montgrí and the Mont Pla mountain—was a dryland farming area known for its olive groves, vineyards and cereal crops. The maritime zone of the coast and the Medes Islands includes an archipelago of 7 islets that have become an important flora and fauna marine reserve in the Western Mediterranean, becoming an appreciated destination for divers. Finally, the plain and wetlands of the mouth of the Ter River irrigate large areas of land, where mainly fruit trees and rice fields are grown. Such variety in the mosaic of the landscape organizes an agricultural scenery that characterizes the ecosystem of the area (Tourist Office of l'Estartit & Torroella de Montgrí Town Hall, n.d.).

In turn, these three distinct areas are distributed into the territory of 8 different municipalities, thus adding complexity to the understanding of the region. These municipalities include Torroella de Montgrí, which contributes to more than half of the park's territory (55%), while the rest is divided between the municipalities of Pals (7%), Belcaire (6%), l'Escala (4%), Palau Sator (1%), Ullà (1%), Fontanilles (1%) and Gualta (0.1%) (Tourist Office of l'Estartit & Torroella de Montgrí Town Hall, n.d.; Generalitat de Catalunya, 2021). A brief description of each of these municipalities is attached below with special mention of its contribution to the primary sector.

- Belcaire d'Empordà: the medieval castle-palace and the old pond dedicated to the cultivation of rice stand out.
- L'Escala: tourist fishing village that possesses the renowned archaeological site of Empúries. It bases its gastronomic offer in fish, shellfish, and the tradition of salting anchovies.
- Fontanilles and Llabià: the church and the castle stand out. Alfalfa cultivation predominates, along with cereals, vegetables and fruit, livestock and poultry.
- Pals: well-preserved medieval and tourist village surrounded by wetlands where high quality rice has grown since the XVth century.
- Torroella de Montgrí and l'Estartit: in the past it was a royal town, which is reflected in its historical heritage. Currently its economy is based on traditional agriculture and livestock although the main activity is industrial, commercial and touristic. L'Estartit offers a variety of nautical and nature activities.
- Gualta: the flour mill of the XVIIth century and the bridge on the Daró river from the XVIth century stand out. The landscape is dominated by irrigated agriculture.
- Palau-sator: it includes the population centres of Fontclara, Sant Feliu and Sant Julià de Boada, Palau-Sator and the neighbourhood of Pantaleu. It stands out for its typical medieval architecture characteristic of the towns of the Baix Empordà.
- Ullà: located directly beneath the arid lands of the Montgrí massif and the fertile plain extending to the banks of the river Ter. Its economy is based on agriculture—vineyards, olive groves, vegetable gardens, and fruit orchards, as well as some existing large industries (Generalitat de Catalunya & Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, 2017).

4.2. Current tourism offer

The tourist offers of the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park are primarily based on active tourism, nature tourism and ecotourism, in which nautical and land-based activities stand out. The range of land-based activities is structured around a network of marked trails totalling 180km, while the range of aquatic activities revolves around the Medes Islands Marine Reserve. The offer is completed with ecotourism activities primarily based on wildlife observation and nature photography, complemented by interpretive experiences of the territory (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026; Generalitat de Catalunya & Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, 2017).

Land-based activities

The network of 180km of marked trails allows visitors to explore the region on foot, by bicycle, or on horseback, traversing flat terrain (the Ter River plain) or mountainous areas (the Montgrí massif), with routes suiting various levels of difficulty and duration. The route network connects the different municipalities that make up the park, while other routes such as the Pirinexus Route, the Ter Route, the Baix Empordà Cycle Tourism Network or the GR-92 allow the connection of the park's trail netting to a broader network connecting the park to the rest of the territory (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026; Generalitat de Catalunya & Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, 2017). Recently, the Natural Park has also regulated rock climbing, a popular activity among visitors, which was officially permitted and regulated in 2024 (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026).

Aquatic activities

The Natural Park is home to a wide variety of companies that specialize in offering water activities around the marine reserve of the Medes Islands and its area of influence, with the marinas of l'Escala and l'Estartit being the main departure points for most nautical activities. The main offered activities are scuba diving—which historically hovers around 60.000 dives/year (Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Territori i Sostenibilitat & Parc Natural del Montgrí, les Illes Medes i el Baix Ter, 2019)—snorkelling, freediving and boat excursions; although kayaking, sailing, boat rental, surfing, paddle surfing and windsurfing also have their niche market (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026; Generalitat de Catalunya & Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, 2017). Only in l'Estartit, located directly in front of the Medes Islands, 38 companies dedicate to offering these types of activities (Tourist Office of l'Estartit & Torroella de Montgrí Town Hall, n.d.).

Ecotourism and interpretive experiences

The active tourism offer is complemented by a nature tourism and ecotourism offer, among which bird watching stands out. These tourist typologies are mostly carried out in the observatories of the Ter river plain, where typical species of wetland areas can be spotted. However, other species of interest can also be found in the Montgrí massif and the cliffs of the Natural Park. Bird watching can be complemented by sightings of amphibians and reptiles in the restored lagoon next to Puig de la Fonollera (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026; Generalitat de Catalunya & Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, 2017).

Whether terrestrial or underwater, nature photography also occupies a significant role in the park's tourist offer through the Àlex Lorente photography competition, which attracts both professional

and amateur photographers (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026; Generalitat de Catalunya & Parc Natural del Montgrí, les Illes Medes i el Baix Ter, 2025).

In turn, the guided underwater tours not only offer a dive, but also an opportunity to discover the biology and ecology of the different species and habitats of the marine reserve. Similarly, on land, interpretive trails and guided tours are scheduled through specialized companies or directly by the Natural Park (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026).

Complementary offer

Finally, the park also offers visits to its museums, with the Mediterranean Museum serving as the Natural Park's Interpretation Centre and the Espai Medes as the Marine Reserve's Interpretation Centre. Its historical and cultural heritage—which includes the tradition of dry stone construction (declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO), the prehistoric remains of the Montgrí massif, and the farmhouses and defense towers of the river plain—complements the offering along with an ever-increasing presence of local products and a variety of gastronomic products (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026; Generalitat de Catalunya & Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, 2017).

4.3 Local producers, products and existing initiatives

Just recently, the entire range of local and gastronomic products produced within the natural park has been inventoried (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026). From Montgrí olive oil, L'Escala anchovies, and Pals rice, each of the identified products is detailed below with information on its geographical origin, characteristics, environmental and heritage value, and its specific contribution to agrobiotourism practices (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026; Tourist Office of l'Estartit & Torroella de Montgrí Town Hall, n.d.; Generalitat de Catalunya & Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, 2017).

Olive oil

- Geographic origin: production mainly located on the slopes of the Montgrí massif.
- Characteristics: extra virgin olive oil, normally from native varieties such as Argudell, Corivel and Verde. Productions registered in the Empordà Oil Protected Designation of Origin.
- Environmental value: identified environmental values range from native varieties recovered after the abandonment of olive groves and the recovery of abandoned spaces to contributing to fire prevention and erosion and the maintenance of a Mediterranean mosaic landscape.
- Heritage value: related to the dry-stone heritage and possible restoration of old oil mills.
- Contribution to agrobiotourism: one of the producers offers an olive groves and factory guided tour, and a sensory tasting of extra virgin olive oils (Fontclara, n.d.).

Artisanal fishing

- Geographic origin: the fishermen in this area are mostly grouped into two guilds, the one in l'Escala and the one in l'Estartit; fishing is distributed throughout the Peripheral Protection Zone of the Partial Marine Reserve of the islands (where fishing is only

permitted to artisanal fishermen registered in L'Estartit) and in the coastal strip of the park.

- Characteristics: the most prominent species are anchovy, lobster, sea bass, gilthead bream, squid, and sardine.
- Environmental value: the marine reserve not only provides protection benefits but also promotes the sustainable management of fisheries resources, such as the Projecte Sepia (which aims to recover the population of cuttlefish and squid in the region) (Projecte Sepia, 2025).
- Heritage value: the Fishermen's Guild of l'Escala has created the Fish Interpretation Centre—MARAM, preserving the historical fishing heritage of the municipality. The Espai Medes, interpretation centre of the Medes Islands marine reserve, has included a section in its permanent exhibition dedicated to artisanal fishing.
- Contribution to agrobiotourism: MARAM promotes fishing tourism by encouraging participants to board a traditional boat accompanying the fishermen on a morning of fishing.

Pals Rice

- Geographic origin: especially grown in Pals and in the Baix Ter wetlands area.
- Characteristics: native varieties such as the bay or the bomba and new ones such as the carnaroli or the nembo that are included in the rice of Pals gastronomic brand.
- Environmental value: the flooded fields are habitats for birds, amphibians, reptiles, insects, and unique flora.
- Heritage value: the heritage value is showcased by the long history of rice cultivation, which started in the 15th century, by the "Rice Route" promoted by the municipality of Pals, and by the existence of traditional and contemporary mills.
- Contribution to agrobiotourism: some producers offer guided tours and tastings of rice-based products such as liqueurs (Arròs l'Estany de Pals, n.d.; Arròs de Pals S.L., n.d.).

Girona Apple

- Geographic origin: cultivated in the Baix Ter plain, especially in the municipality of Ullà.
- Characteristics: included in the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) Girona Apple; the most recognized varieties are Golden, Reed Delicious, Royal Gala, Granny Smith and Pink Lady, although some local varieties have also been maintained.
- Environmental value: processes are applied to promote the diversity of the agricultural ecosystem and the promotion of consumption of nearby products.
- Heritage value: heritage values include the recovering of native varieties and the maintenance of a long-standing cultivation tradition.
- Contribution to agrobiotourism: some of the producers offer guided tours and tastings of apple-related products such as juices or ciders (Mas Boixó, n.d.; MOOMA, 2026).

Wines from the Montgrí

- Geographic origin: at the foot of the Montgrí massif and in the Pals area.
- Characteristics: in the area of influence of the Denomination of Origin Empordà in which the main uniqueness of the area is Garnatxa de l'Empordà.
- Environmental value: maintenance of local varieties as well as protection of the Mediterranean mosaic landscape.
- Heritage value: heritage values include the maintenance of a long-standing cultivation tradition and wineries as spaces intimately rooted in the territory.
- Contribution to agrobiotourism: producers offer guided tours, wine tastings and experiences combining yoga and wine (Mas Geli, n.d.; Viticultors Muixach, n.d.).

Anchovy from L'Escala

- Geographic origin: town of l'Escala (long tradition of salting anchovies). Although many come from other parts of the territory, the salting tradition is unique to L'Escala.
- Characteristics: anchovies salted with an artisanal production made with natural products.
- Environmental value: the "Anxova de l'Escala" Guarantee Mark (private certification) ensures the artisanal method and its local origin. Environmental values also include the consumption of local blue fish.
- Heritage value: heritage values include a long historical tradition as an anchovy industry, the Anchovy and Salt Museum in l'Escala and the reputation of being a gastronomic and tourist emblem.
- Contribution to agrobiotourism: some producers offer guided tours and anchovy tastings with tomato bread and some have a part of the factory adapted as a museum-visitor area (Salaons Solés, 2026; Anxoves Fill de J. Callol i Serrats, n.d.).

Montgrí honey

- Geographic origin: the Montgrí massif.
- Characteristics: a multifloral organic honey with rosemary and fruit trees, extra clear amber colour and fruity aroma.
- Environmental value: the only honeys that can be certified as ecological in the Empordà are those produced in protected natural areas, as in the case of the natural park of Montgrí, the Medes Islands and the Baix Ter. Environmental values also include the conservation of biodiversity thanks to pollination processes.
- Heritage value: heritage values include being part of the intangible cultural heritage of the Empordà and the transmission of traditional knowledge.
- Contribution to agrobiotourism: one of the producers offers the possibility of being a beekeeper for a day and tastings of honey (Abellaires Empordanesos, 2026).

Aromatic herbs

1. Geographic origin: cultivated in different areas located in the Empordà, including the territory of the natural park.
2. Characteristics: ecological cultivation production in small areas of land where work is done in an artisanal way. The most popular aromatic herbs are thyme, rosemary, lavender, orange blossom, sage, oregano, calendula, ajedrea, mint, poleo (poleo-mint), basil and Maria Luisa.
3. Environmental value: these include ecological production in small areas of land, minimum impact due to manual collection, and biodiversity of cultivated varieties.
4. Heritage value: these include traditional knowledge about plants and its medicinal and gastronomic properties and the protection and promotion of the Mediterranean herbal tradition.
5. Contribution to agrotourism: the producer offers guided visits and experiences in his cultivation camp ranging from the preparation of mojitos, ratafia, and gin to the tasting of infusions (Emporrom, n.d.).

Wicker crafts

- Geographic origin: Torroella de Montgrí.
- Characteristics: traditional basketry, contemporary basketry, plant architecture, land art, custom-made pieces, restoration of rush and cane chairs, lamps, wicker and cane panels, ropework, cane fences, traditional fishing traps. Usually made with wicker, rushes, reeds, canes, bamboo, olive, and cattails.
- Environmental value: environmental values include the use of natural, renewable and biodegradable fibres; the utilization of local resources; and low energy impact artisanal production.
- Heritage value: traditional farming know-how and artisanal activity.
- Contribution to agrotourism: the craftsman has his workshop open to the public in the morning (an appointment is required) and offers workshops and courses through different organizations when requested (Tramats, n.d.).

After having identified the main products of the park territory, it is important to highlight some of the emerging initiatives that already connect the natural park territory with local producers and tourism. Some of these experiences include the "És del Montgrí" project, promoted by the Torroella de Montgrí City Council, which showcases products from the Natural Park in empty commercial premises. This not only promotes local products but also reduces the negative visual impact of vacant stores on the destination's image (Ajuntament de Torroella de Montgrí, 2026). Additionally, the natural park has created a website that covers the park's eight municipalities—allowing users to search for local producers—and has also joined the "Made in the Park" program, which seeks to strengthen productive activity rooted in the territory aligning with the conservation of natural heritage and the promotion of agri-food production and crafts (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026). Finally, several initiatives of municipal nature such as the apple or Mediterranean sand eel gastronomic days in Torroella de Montgrí-L'Estartit (Visit Estartit, 2026)

or the rice route of the Pals tourist train (El Xiulet de Pals, 2026) further promote the current presence of local products in the territory.

The previous information is intended to justify the chosen case study given the long-standing agricultural tradition of the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, its proximity to existing tourist markets, and the current emerging initiatives already connecting the natural park territory with local producers and tourism. Together, these factors offer a unique opportunity to explore the practical applications of agrotourism and the promotion of local products as strategies for tourism diversification in the Mediterranean context—which includes identifying the opportunities, challenges, and practical considerations associated with their implementation within this protected area.

5. Results

The following section presents the results of the 12 semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders of the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park. The participants, as specified in *section 3* (methodology), have been classified into two groups according to their nature corresponding on the one hand, to the administration or public sector (n=5) and, on the other, to local producers or private sector (n=7). In order to construct the discourse presented below and to maintain the anonymity of the participants, codes have been generated for each participant: *executive 1*, *executive 2*, *executive 3*, *executive 4*, *executive 5* (public sector), and *producer 1*, *producer 2*, *producer 3*, *producer 4*, *producer 5*, *producer 6*, *producer 7* (private sector). The results seek to provide information that allows for a deeper understanding of the perceptions, opportunities, and barriers surrounding the integration of local products and agrotourism into the park's tourism offer. They are presented following the structure marked by the interview's thematic blocks—starting with the quantitative rating-scale question—along with the corresponding subsections created once the data analysis was carried out, relating the results with the information collected in the literature review section.

5.1 Rating scale question: current presence of local products in the tourism offer

The rating scale question was designed to establish the starting point for the research regarding the current presence of local products in the park's/municipality's tourism offer. The question was as follows: “*On a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high), how would you rate the current presence of local products in the park's/municipality's tourism offer?*”. Due to the small sample size, it has been considered appropriate to attach the table with the results, showing the average, median and standard deviation for the public sector group, the private sector group, and the overall sample.

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Score (1-5)</i>
Executive 1	3
Executive 2	2.75
Executive 3	4.25

Executive 4	4
Executive 5	2
<i>Mean</i>	3.2
<i>Median</i>	3
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	1
Producer 1	2
Producer 2	1
Producer 3	2
Producer 4	1
Producer 5	1.5
Producer 6	4
Producer 7	1
<i>Mean</i>	1.79
<i>Median</i>	1.5
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	1.17
<i>Overall Mean</i>	2.38
<i>Overall Median</i>	2
<i>Overall Standard Deviation</i>	1.20

Table 1: statistical information collected during the interviews

The overall mean, 2.38/5, indicates a moderate-to-low presence of local products in the tourist offer of the park/municipalities. However, there is a notable difference between the average of the public sector and the average of the private sector, these being 3.2 and 1.79 respectively, which suggests that while the public sector perceives a medium-to-high integration of local

products in the tourism offer of the territory, the private sector remains sceptical and critical of such integration.

The overall median of 2/5 shows that the typical participant perceives a rather low presence of local products in the region's tourism offerings. The difference between the median for the public sector and the median for the private sector is again significant, at 3 and 1.5 respectively, suggesting that the typical public sector participant perceives a moderate presence, while the typical private sector participant perceives a low-to-very low presence.

The gaps observed between the public and private sectors, both in the mean and median results, demonstrate that they are evaluating the presence of local products in the area's tourism offerings differently, whether due to their understanding of "presence" or because they are assessing different realities. While the public sector bases its responses more on highlighting existing and emerging initiatives, the private sector bases its response more on the direct impact these initiatives may have on its economy.

Regarding the standard deviation, the overall standard deviation of 1.2 indicates moderate-to-high variability in participant responses, demonstrating a lack of clear consensus regarding the presence of local products in the region's tourism offerings. In this case, the standard deviations for the public and private sectors, 1 and 1.17 respectively, show that the public sector exhibits slightly greater consensus, while the private sector displays more variability.

In the case of the public sector, the variability in the responses is mainly due to *Executive 3 and 4*. The comments of their responses highlighted different items of their municipalities reinforcing the presence of local products in the territory such as the Anchovy and Salt Museum in L'Escala or the cultural rice train route in Pals. Other public sector participants justified their low-to-moderate scores with comments such as: "a very recent vision, it can still be valued more; it could have more potential than we are currently giving it" (*Executive 2*), "not very good, it's very low; it is a problem because you go to any restaurant here, you look at the bottle of oil and it comes from Jaén" (*Executive 5*), "a low presence" (*Executive 1*). This could indicate that municipalities with a more developed local product perceive a greater presence of local products in the territory's tourism offer, while the rest show a less positive view.

In the case of the private sector, the variability mainly comes from *producer 6*, representing the rice sector with a score of 4/5. However, the rest of the private sector participants gave low-to-very low scores with comments such as: "there is a long way to go" (*Producer 1*), "the representation is generally bad, we need more local products and more local product flags" (*Producer 3*), "a 1... because otherwise, I would put a 0" (*Producer 4*). The outlier response from *producer 6* may indicate that the rice sector is among the best represented in the park's tourism offerings and that its agrobiotourism proposals are integrating well into the territory, while other products remain more excluded.

5.2 Block 1: Context, role, and economic activity

5.2.1 Most relevant economic activities

Participants consistently identify tourism as the area's main economic pillar, while the primary sector remains secondary. *Executive 1* explicitly states that the primary sector currently represents 20-25% of the total's regional economy while the rest is represented by the tourism sector. *Executive 5* gives more details on the distribution of production in the primary sector and specifies that within it, the rice sector is the most dominant followed by "fruit, in a very secondary way,

and also oil production in the Montgrí massif and livestock farming in the Muntanya Gran", which may justify the high score that *producer 6* (from the rice sector) gave to the current presence of local products in the territory.

5.2.2 Tourism profile

The public sector participants agree that their offerings are largely based on sun and beach tourism. However, each indicates the specific characteristics that differentiate them. *Executive 2* highlights the municipality's efforts to complement its mass tourism and sun and beach tourism offerings with "a sustainable, responsible, natural tourism destination, where people can come and enjoy the main resources we have, such as the Montgrí, Medes Islands, and Baix Ter Natural Park." It specifically mentions that these two realities can complement each other. *Executive 3* presents its municipality as "a second-home destination par excellence, family-friendly and weekend-oriented", heavily dependent on the Catalan and French markets, although the presence of international and senior tourism is steadily increasing. *Executive 4* argues that they complement their sun and beach tourism offering with gastronomy, culture, historical heritage, nature, family and sports tourism. *Executive 5* states that, aside from "summer tourism", the park relies primarily on scuba divers. It explicitly states that "it's difficult to explain to these summer tourists that they need to consume local products" while it also acknowledges that "there is already more and more of this profile". The responses demonstrate that the reality of the region, heavily reliant on sun and beach tourism, makes it difficult to promote a diverse offering. Even so, participants are aware of the importance of providing this diversity and highlight the growing presence of tourist profiles more conscious of the region and the environment, illustrating the existing duality of the territory.

When it comes to producers, when asked about their relationship with tourists, most highlight activities such as guided tours, participation in fairs, and experiential activities like fishing trips with a local fisherman (*Producer 5*). Some emphasize the significant nature of this relationship: "We have many foreign customers from all nationalities, with a special mention for Dutch; we also have Catalans who have second homes here" (*Producer 1*), "80% of the people who come here are tourists, and 70% of the guided tours are in a foreign language" (*Producer 2*), "Almost all of the tourism we have contact with is national, that is, from Catalonia, basically because we conduct field visits in both Catalan and Spanish" (*Producer 3*). Others link their contact with tourists to the percentage of sales that comes from this specific profile: "I sell 40% to tourists and 60% to locals" (*Producer 4*). Thus, whether through the activities they carry out or through sales, they all have contact with tourists to a greater or lesser extent, as will be seen in subsequent sections.

5.3 Block 2: Visitors, demand, and opportunities

5.3.1 Interest in local products

Executive 2 points out that while some people are interested in local products, these "are not yet the main motivation", although there is a growing interest that is "taking root". *Executive 3* mentions that there is a "more palpable interest in international family tourism out of season", since "the visitor who comes to us in the summer is very loyal and very repetitive and he has already discovered this product". *Executive 4* explains that at tourist offices, visitors ask more for "gastronomy, culture, concerts, activities, and added values" and that "families are very interested in it, they find it very educational and pedagogical". However, *executive 5* distinguishes between two types of tourists: "There is sun and beach tourism, which I don't think comes here looking for this (local products), in fact, many don't even know they are in a natural park; the people who do

these nature activities, obviously all these people know they are in a park and therefore are much more receptive to spending on a local product”.

When it comes to producers, they all agree that there is a palpable interest in discovering local products or related experiences. *Producer 4* explains: "They do have an interest, they are looking for something typical of this place, they are looking to take a gift home, they are looking for local products, something exclusive that is only made here". *Producer 5* states: "Very, very, very, 100%; they are very interested in how you can buy fish, where you can buy fish, which restaurants you can go to eat fish from here". *Producer 3* specifies that French tourists "highly value this type of organic and quality product" but doubts whether this interest persists when they buy "normal" products at the supermarket. When asked about this distinction, he states that the value placed on this type of product is related to "showing the product and explaining it". *Producer 2* questions whether the value truly lies in the product itself or in the experience behind it: "I think it's not so much the local product, but rather the experience you offer that attracts them." *Producer 6* makes a similar observation, but instead of emphasizing the experience, it highlights the landscape above the product itself: "Tourists are looking for all this; people like to know the products of the region, but I think what they appreciate is the landscape behind it... it's more related to the environment and the place." Finally, *Producer 7* expresses an idea that is repeated among participants: "There are two types of tourism; tourism that comes for 15 days or a month or a week, they certainly won't come here, they come for other things. But those who go deeper into the territory, who look for things that are special about the place, they do come (referring to their production centre)”.

The responses indicate that although local products are not the primary motivation for visitors to the region, there is a growing interest in these types of products and related experiences, perceived by both the public sector and producers. However, the observations of *executive 5* and *producer 7* highlight the duality of the region, with its focus on mass tourism centred on sun and beaches, and a more nature-based tourism more receptive to this type of offering. It is also important to note the comments of *producers 3, 2, and 6* regarding the importance of showcasing and explaining the product, as well as the experience and landscape behind it, which relate to the observations of Korez-Vide (2017) who affirms that tourists do not only seek to buy a product but the story behind it.

5.3.2 Added value offered by local products

When asked, *producer 1* argues that local products bring great value to the territory, highlighting their relationship with the maintenance of the landscape and the environment "where time stands still, there is no rush and nature is all around". In addition, they highlight the value of "recovering the vineyards" in the region as well as a way "of expressing landscape and territory". This added value related to the landscape and the territory, as transformers or protectors of it, is commented on by other producers such as *producer 3* ("thinking about the territory"), *producer 4* ("we are part of a project to recover abandoned olive groves"), and *producer 6* ("we work on the landscape"). Following this line of thought, *Producers 5 and 6* further emphasize their role as protectors of biodiversity with comments such as "we are trying to maintain biodiversity" and "We work on the landscape. If we stop producing, a lot of biodiversity will die”.

Other mentioned added values are related to the idea of raising awareness of unknown professions “jobs that were once normal are now special; we explain an unknown job” (*producer 7*), “a fairly unknown world in general” (*producer 2*), or to promoting authentic, high-quality products “it is authentic and we know all know the effort that goes into it which in the end transforms into quality” (*producer 3*), "the variety is argudell (olive oil), which is native to the Empordà (they

can only find it here); a product made with effort and a lot of dedication; a quality product of 10/10" (*producer 4*), "a high quality product" (*producer 6*).

Therefore, taking into account the producers' responses, local products contribute to the territory through their relationship with the maintenance of the landscape, the environment and biodiversity, as well as by promoting unknown professions and producing high-quality products. These responses relate to the assessments of Blanco & González (2025) and Eagles et al. (2002) regarding the promotion of cultural and natural conservation, while also showing a direct contrast between the high-quality products described by producers and the descriptions made by Campbell & López (2012), who highlights a current global agricultural system heavily reliant on pesticides, fertilizers, intensive farming and monocultures.

5.3.3 Why engage with tourism?

The reasons why producers decide to engage with the tourism sector are primarily economic. *Producer 1* explicitly states "an economic need to make the entire project sustainable". *Producer 2* and *3* explain the difficulties of trying to sell a product with a higher price and how engaging with tourism helped them consolidate the price or even increase it: "I was very clear about it, I was going to sell oil, or rather the door-to-door service, and the first thing they told me was 'it's very expensive', then I was going to do the opposite, have the customer come here and show him, and then they would say, 'Shouldn't you raise the price?'; instead of investing in commercials, we invested in who gives the guided tours" (*producer 2*), "In terms of quantity (of the product), the price is very poorly valued; to give value to the product and be able to sell at the price we believe, that is, at the price that our product deserves (otherwise it is very difficult to sell because of the high price it has)" (*producer 3*). Aside from the economic factor, *producers 1* and *6* mention an opportunity to showcase the stunning surrounding landscape, while they also acknowledge a "differential feature from other brands" (*producer 6*). The economic factor mentioned by the producers, who, once they show and explain the product, perceive a greater willingness to pay higher prices, is related to the observations made by Blanco & Gonzalez (2025) explaining that unique, genuine, and meaningful experiences enhance the quality and perceived value of these specific tourism offerings, and to the observations of Williams (2001) who asserts that the relationship between territory and product increases and enhances the value of local resources.

Although most producers are actively engaged with tourism, the cases of *producers 4* and *7* demonstrate that not all producers are interested in direct contact with tourists but rather accept it passively, either because they lack the means to actively engage in it or because they are more focused on production: "I can't offer tours because we are a family; all this takes time and staff that I don't have; you have to prioritize, and our priority is a good product and that people can enjoy it" (*producer 4*), "The workshop is open to the public, but we operate behind closed doors. The website says that if they want to come, they should arrange a visit; it's not like we have the door open, nor is this a store" (*producer 7*). This demonstrates that not all producers are interested in offering tourist experiences, showing a duality between those who are committed to it and have the necessary resources to engage with it, and those who are strictly focused on production or do not have the necessary resources to offer these type of experiences.

5.3.4 Opportunities for sensory or experiential activities

When asked about opportunities to develop sensory or experiential activities, participants show a broad positive consensus, but the degree of enthusiasm with which they perceive these opportunities varies. *Executive 1* notes that experiences related to local products "are already happening", although it highlights that "each municipality generates its own experiences".

Executive 2 sees a clear path forward but warns that a “bigger push” is needed. *Executive 3* finds these experiences “very interesting from the perspective of knowing where these products come from and the why behind these products”. *Executive 4* is the one who shows the most enthusiasm and indicates that “the potential is enormous”. Similarly, *Executive 5* uses the success of wine experiences as an example to showcase this potential: “Nature and gastronomic experiences, this always works, they are very typical and are exploited a lot. Viticulture experiences for example, there is no winery today that does not have a small winery, that does not have its wine tourism visit”.

On the side of the private sector, *Producer 1* sees a great opportunity and states that they are currently carrying out these types of experiences motivated by “taking advantage of the tourist environment in which they are located” and by “the need to make their project economically viable”. However, although most producers recognize the opportunities these experiences offer, some express that their interest is contingent on production, meaning they are only interested as long as it doesn't negatively impact their production capacity. *Producer 2*, for example, perceives guided tours as a source of income but explains: “It's not about dedicating ourselves to the tours; we want to dedicate ourselves to agriculture, but to making agriculture known, we see that we have to go into tourism or reach out to people who are passing through.” This idea is frequently repeated throughout the interviews, both by the public and private sectors.

5.3.5 Opportunities for collaboration (joint routes or networks)

In general terms, the willingness to collaborate is widespread, as demonstrated by the responses of most participants. *Executive 2* explains, “I do see potential and a good product that would help us seek or further promote all this tourism outside the tourist season and an additional offering for visitors.” *Executive 3* focuses on the opportunity presented by the proximity between municipalities, “This is an area where we have proximity between one municipality and another, where we can feed off each other and be able to allow a much broader experience.”

Producers are also willing to collaborate, but with conditions. *Producer 2* explains, “We are 100% open to everything that benefits us both.” *Producer 4* states, “Everything they propose to us, we try to collaborate to the best of our ability.” *Producer 5* believes he participates in everything that is proposed to him and considers willingness the most important factor when it comes to collaboration. He also states that “it has to be a win-win.” However, *Producer 2* places the most emphasis on conditions, explaining, “We collaborate a lot and we like to collaborate, but we also want someone to pay us something, right?”. The conditions he specifies for favourably considering a collaboration include not having a very high cost, the recognition of their product, that it doesn't take up a lot of time, and that it brings them benefits. They also express uncertainty about the difficulty in measuring certain actions; they question the extent to which certain actions have a return, since some are difficult to assess.

Although the willingness to collaborate is generally widespread, the next section presents the difficulties participants encounter when trying to pursue these synergies, as well as when trying to enhance the offer and promotion of local products and related experiences.

5.4 Block 3: Barriers, coordination, and governance

5.4.1 Challenges preventing a stronger presence of local products in the territory

Participants express a wide variety of challenges that have been classified into different categories. In this way, a better treatment of the data is expected.

Structural and capacity barriers (time, infrastructure, staff and funding)

The vast majority of participants specified obstacles related to time, infrastructure, human resources, and funding. Some mentioned the precarious staffing situation at the natural park. *Executive 5* expressed it this way: "The problem, if you can call it a problem, is that we are not a team; I am alone. I have to handle everything that is my responsibility all at once". *Producer 6* is also concerned about staff and comments "Finding people who speak languages is not that easy (to do tours), it's also difficult to keep that person when you have them since you have to ensure visits all year round", relating it to one of the problems of the territory, seasonality.

Producer 5 also expresses concern about the difficulty of handling so many responsibilities simultaneously: "it means work, managing coordination and distribution, and someone has to be responsible for it." This difficulty is related to the view of other participants who state, "They are not tourist companies (producers)" (*Executive 1*), and to the view of the producers themselves, as some express that their number one priority is production. *Executive 5* explicitly states: "producers are not only asked to produce, but to produce, transform, package and market, and that is a lot of work...".

Communication, visibility and marketing

The lack of a coherent and unified communication strategy is a recurring theme throughout the interviews. *Executive 1* states: "The offer is not very clear and is not offered to them (tourists) in a very direct way." *Executive 2* points to a need to structure a unified message around local products and their promotion, since now "everyone does their work from their own plot", a view shared by *Producer 1* who states that "everyone is going their own way". *Executive 5*, representing a part of the public sector, acknowledges that they "lack this aspect of communication." From the producers' point of view, they also note a lack of a clear, unified, and structured communication strategy. *Producer 1* argues that there is a "lack of knowledge of everything that is produced in the area," while *Producers 4* and *5* explain that local products need greater visibility, especially in the port area of L'Estartit, as a high-traffic area. *Producer 4* expresses it this way: "We need to give more visibility to local products in L'Estartit because a lot of people go there, and in the Espai Medes or the Museu de la Mediterrània, cultural spaces where people who might be interested in local products can go". However, both executives and producers acknowledge that a more coherent and unified communication strategy is beginning to take shape, although as *Executive 1* states: "it will take some time for it to really take root".

Private/Public will

Some participants mention the lack of willingness from the public and private sectors as an impediment to greater integration of local products into the region's tourism offerings. *Executive 2* addresses this issue explaining that the private sector's commitment is essential, and that if they decide that their sole focus is production, they cannot be forced to engage with tourism. *Executive 5* expresses a similar sentiment: "I believe that a very important part of the sector is not willing, or rather, it's not that they're unwilling—I mean, I'm not criticizing them either—but it's not part of their business objectives to promote a local product." *Executive 1* specifically mentions difficulty in involving new actors, referring to producers. However, *Producer 1*, a highly involved actor in the creation of agrobiotourist experiences, focuses on the public sector and demands greater willingness from the administration to adopt an encouraging approach towards private companies.

At this point, it is important to highlight the assessments of Vargas-Peralvo et al. (2025) who argue that the success of these models depends on promoting a culture of innovation within productive and host communities, enabling the transformation of rural resources into meaningful tourist experiences. However, this appears to be a challenging aspect given the variety of profiles among producers. Some, as evidenced by *Producer 1*, are deeply involved in developing an agrotourism strategy, while others have an intermediate profile—they “tolerate” tourism without fully embracing it. Finally, there are producers who prefer to focus solely on production, either because they lack the resources or simply have no interest in getting involved with tourism activities.

Administrative and legislative

Many participants express their dissatisfaction with a complex administrative and legislative situation that disadvantages them. *Executive 3* points out that there are “many administrative or territorial impediments taking into account that the visitor, and especially an international one, does not understand borders between municipalities.” *Executive 5* focuses on the lack of real policies protecting local products: “we do not have real policies that protect local produce...”. *Producer 3* bluntly states, “the administration is not agile, and a lot of time is wasted...”. They also specify that they tried to adhere to the European Chart for Sustainable Tourism but found it complicated and ultimately gave up. *Producer 5* seems to be one of the most affected by administrative and legislative barriers and expresses a wide variety of obstacles when trying to sell its product (“we always have to go through the fish market... we wanted to do it like a cooperative... but they cut us off... it was a bureaucratic mess to manage it”), or when trying to participate in tourist experiences (“we can only go fishing from Monday to Friday, so when we do the fishing tourism activity it has to be during these days. In addition, everything I catch has to be bought by the activity's clients and I can only set half the net that I would set on a normal day... and if they don't want the fish I've caught, what do I do with it, I can't go and sell it at the fish market”).

Economic barriers (pricing)

When it comes to selling local products, price is one of the obstacles that many participants face. *Executive 5* puts it this way: “since it is expensive (local produce), they prefer to buy it in other places (talking about restaurants).” *Producers 3* and *4* make very similar comments and explain that price is one of the main obstacles preventing greater integration of local products into the area's tourism offering: “Restaurants work with distributors, which, with our price, makes market penetration difficult” (*producer 3*) and “restoration is a bit problematic; an artisanal product increases the cost, and not everyone is willing to invest in higher-quality products” (*producer 4*). Despite the difficulties, these comments reinforce the observations made by Blanco & Gonzalez (2025) and Williams (2001) on the importance of uniting territory and unique, genuine, and meaningful experiences to enhance the quality and perceived value of these resources.

Market and scale barriers

Executive 5 gives a very valuable insight into the difficulties related to market and scale barriers in which he refers to obstacles related to the volume of production and the difficulty producers face in penetrating a structural global market: “The Natural Park has a relatively small production, if demand exploded there wouldn't be enough product to satisfy a demand for mass tourism. The idea is to focus more on rural and nature tourism, since there is an increasing number of rural tourism experiences and that's what we have to focus on, these small models are enough to absorb

everything we do here...”, “now we are at a time when everything has to go through a market, and the market economy is this part where everything is lost, right?, this entire productive sector with hundreds of years of experience sold their products at the weekly market, you know?, all of this economy has disappeared as such... the smallest part ends up being kept by the farmer and that is why there is this idea, that the farmer must reach the consumer directly, but this is very difficult”; “We have to think about strategies for cooperative marketing and distribution networks, they are key. We don't have to think as individuals, but as a collective, because otherwise, we won't get by”.

At this point, Campbell & López's (2012) observations regarding society's call for a reconnection between agriculture, society, the environment, and ecology as a reaction to this global market seem to gain importance. *Executive 5* mentions that if demand were to explode, there wouldn't be enough product to satisfy it. However, the focus of agrobiotourism is not on production but on the experiences built around it, which would decouple the level of production, whether higher or lower, from the possibility of offering these experiences. In any case, the difficulty in offering these experiences would rather stem from the structural and capacity barriers (time, infrastructure, staff and funding) of small producers. *Executive 5* also offers two important observations: first, the need to focus on market niches interested in more rural and nature-based tourism, and second, the need to think collaboratively at both the marketing and distribution levels.

Conflicts of interest between park administration and producers

Some producers express concern about the dichotomy the natural park faces between protection and conservation versus use and development. *Producer 1* expresses this directly, stating, "Perhaps there is a dichotomy of totally different interests (producers and natural park)." *Producer 5* points out, "Yes, it helps us (the natural park), but we are all a bit on edge, because while it helps us all, there are always obstacles; it is very complicated, and they also have their own legislation, a lot of bureaucracy; we like that the park is here, but there should be a little more feedback." *Producer 6*, member of the European Sustainable Tourism Chart, states: "At the CETS level, it's pretty good, but at the production level, not so good. There's more contact to say, 'Hey, you can't do this because there's a particular bird's nest than anything else". This duality between use and conservation is related to the traditional paradoxes of protected natural areas raised by Wolf et al. (2019) and Mirkarimi and Arrowsmith (2017). Although the natural park seems to be aware of the importance of enhancing economic opportunities in its territory (Eagles et al., 2002), according to the comments from participants, the tension still persists.

5.4.2 Coordination, dialogue, and collaboration

From the public sector's point of view, *Executive 1* denotes the existence of several mechanisms that help promote coordination between actors such as the group of the European Chart for Sustainable Tourism and the Governing Board of the natural park, although it shows concern for the lack of staff in the park administration, which may be hindering a fluid dialogue between the different stakeholders. *Executive 2* affirms that “there is much room for improvement” and specifies that “if collaboration and coordination between administrations is already difficult, going one step further (including producers) is still more difficult”. However, it positively highlights the figure of the Local Development and Employment Promoter of the municipalities within the Natural Park, positioning it as a key figure for the development of this type of offer, and the "Made in the Park" brand promoted by the Generalitat de Catalunya and the Department of Territory and Sustainability. *Executive 3* perceives the technical meetings they hold with the different town councils positively, but warns that "small municipalities, due to lack of

infrastructure, cannot participate in a very direct way." It also points to changes in government as a factor hindering coordination and the lines of work of technicians try to carry out. *Executive 4* regrets that in her municipality there is no tourist and merchant association and explains "right now when we have sector meetings we call them individually; it makes it difficult for there to be significant future actions if the City Council does not lead it." Finally, *executive 5* comments: "It's really hard to find collaboration windows. But hey, they're there, right?".

From the private sector's point of view, *Producer 1* claims to work with a distributor to be able to allocate their product in the territory in addition to reaching collaboration agreements with accommodations such as hotels, campsites and rural houses, but notes that "each one goes a little on their own". They claim that they are "totally open to the idea of collaborating", but that "there is a lot to improve (especially with the natural park, since "they don't make it easy for them, quite the opposite"). *Producer 3* states, "although there is a good relationship and communication and a lot of desire to do, some actions are a waste of time." He explicitly expresses the feeling that there are subsidies that have to be spent anyway and that the administration takes actions that are not useful to try to justify these subsidies. He asks public officials to consult with the producers so that more useful actions can be designed. *Producer 4* laments the lack of dialogue, although she acknowledges that positions are gradually getting closer. *Producer 6* comments on the natural park as follows: "Sometimes things are done without consulting the producers. We understand that it's their job and that there has to be someone who makes decisions because you can never please everyone, but they should consult more."

As can be seen from the participants' responses, the lack of coordination, dialogue, and collaboration is one of the aspects that those interviewed highlighted. Although some mentioned initiatives that seek to improve this situation and acknowledged that progress is gradually being made, these issues persist, resulting in a fragmented coordination with significant shortcomings not only between municipalities, producers, and the natural park separately, but also as a joint governance structure.

5.4.3 Mechanisms to improve governance and shared leadership

When asked about mechanisms that could improve governance and shared leadership as well as coordination, dialogue, and collaboration, participants proposed different methods, which are detailed below:

- Manual and homogeneous discourse: *Executive 2* proposes a "small guide-manual on how to develop local product experiences in the area". The idea is to facilitate a structured and easy project to producers with the aim of encouraging them to take part in these types of experiences. In addition, it could help to "articulate all this homogeneous discourse" (*Executive 2*).
- Listening and meeting spaces: *Executive 1* states that it would be necessary to create an association that would incorporate all stakeholders, while *Producer 1* would be content with just "listening to each other and where we can all propose ideas" plus a "space to explain our needs and what advantages and disadvantages we find". *Executive 3* proposes a fixed working table between the public and private sector, and encourages a more direct participation of smaller municipalities and local population.
- The creation of a Statute: *Producer 5* proposes the creation of a statute similar to the statute of fishermen's guilds, in which collaboration between guilds is specified as

mandatory. They explain that a similar statute should be established at the level of producers and related stakeholders to ensure a high level of collaboration.

- Reliance on the “Made in the Park” brand: *Executive 5* explains “this is very recent (referring to the Made in the Park brand), we just had a meeting last week with a group of producers from different areas (with a group of representatives). As I can't keep up with everyone on a regular basis, we will meet to be able to take stock of what is being done and whether what is being done is good or not, in other words, it is to have much closer feedback”. *Producer 6* also mentions the brand as a possible improvement mechanism but comments “let's see how it evolves, the person in charge looks a little bit lost.”
- Natural Park of the Volcanic Zone of La Garrotxa as a reference model: when it comes to governance and shared leadership, *Executive 1* and *5* perceive the Natural Park of the Volcanic Zone of La Garrotxa as a reference model and identify it as the way to follow.

The proposals raised by the different participants in order to improve governance and collaboration are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. However, the proposed solutions remain fragmented. For instance, relying on the “Made in the Park” brand, as suggested by *Executive 5*, would involve only the natural park and producers, excluding the perspectives of municipalities. Although abandoning this strategy would be inappropriate, as many natural parks are betting on joining the brand, creating a partnership that includes all stakeholders (as suggested by *Executive 1*)—incorporating municipalities as well—appears to be a more proper strategy. The proposal to create a manual on how to create tourism experiences, along with the possibility, if agreed by all stakeholders, of including a collaboration agreement, could be complementary actions to the creation of this association. Furthermore, studying the Garrotxa model, noted by various stakeholders, could serve as an initial step in which to build a solid governance structure.

5.5 Block 4: Theoretical framework – Agrobiotourism, identity, and diversification

5.5.1 Extent to which agrobiotourism could be applied in the territory

Executive 1 expresses that she “strongly agrees” that the concept of agrobiotourism could be applied to the territory of the natural park. However, *executive 2* states that it could be applied to the park under certain conditions, “if it is economically efficient and if there is investment and aid when making this change”. She also notes that specific case studies would be needed to demonstrate its viability, especially under an economic perspective. *Executive 3* perceives it as “a good approach towards the future” since it seems that demand “will ultimately tend towards this line”. *Executive 4* expresses that they are in line with the slow philosophy provided by agrobiotourism approaches and that it is “a fashion that is here to stay.” She states that “small producers have seen that this has a better future than conventional production”, but warns that “it is not easy” and that “it remains to be seen whether in the long term this strategy will be profitable for them”. Finally, *executive 5* perceives it as a “viable and necessary” strategy, stating that the link provided by this philosophy “is fundamental” to the economic success of the region. He also indicates: “It is what we are trying to do, but we don't know enough about it.”

Although the perception of public sector participants is more of a forward-looking one, reality among producers is different. According to their observations, many of them feel they are already working under agrobiotourism parameters. *Producer 1* claims to use organic farming techniques and environmentally friendly practices in their production, “without neglecting everything that

technology offers". They explicitly state that they have been "betting on it since minute zero"; meaning that *Producer 1* has been following the concept's methodology in a spontaneous way—without prior formal knowledge of its definition or explicit use of the term itself. The concept resonates strongly with *Producer 2*, who affirms that their production is "100% sustainable" and with *Producer 3* who states that they try to work as much as possible under this umbrella. *Producer 5* provides an alternative vision and explains: "there are people who are interested in doing agrobiotourism activities but there are those who only want to dedicate themselves to producing, they don't like all this more touristy part", giving visibility to the perspective of some producers who will probably never feel at ease with the tourist aspect of agrobiotourism. *Producer 6* is less familiar with the concept and is unsure of the extent to which it can be applied to their production: "Agriculture, yes; bioeconomy, I don't know to what extent; and tourism, yes." However, they affirm that they produce without insecticides, they rely on the use of drones, and reuse rice husks to feed livestock, and that "this whole issue of local sourcing, sustainability, and filling products with content is being developed extensively and works very well."

Overall, the concept is regarded positively. Most stakeholders believe it could be implemented in the region, while many others already consider their current practices to align with agrobiotourism principles. However, the conditions set by *executive 2*—requiring a study on the concept's economic efficiency, investment, and support—along with *producer 5*'s observations that some producers are not interested in the more tourist-oriented aspects of it, are factors to consider for the concept's successful development in the area. Furthermore, *executive 5*'s perception of his lack of knowledge to carry out such development further intensifies the need for trained figures to lead the project, such as the figure of the Local Development and Employment Promoter, and for studies or manuals charting the course to follow.

5.5.2 Opportunities of agrobiotourism

The following table shows the different opportunities identified regarding the concept of agrobiotourism, along with the specific comments that support them and the participants who expressed them. The identified opportunities are diverse, including enhancing the tourist experience and the destination's image, adding value to local products, diversifying local tourism activities, and reducing seasonality as well as engaging with regenerative tourism. Additional opportunities involve generating economic and employment benefits, serving as a mechanism to protect biodiversity, raising awareness about the importance of health, and promoting the brands of local producers.

<i>Opportunity</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Participants</i>
Adding value to the tourist experience and the destination image	Filling the destination with content beyond sun-and-beach; differentiating element	<i>Executive 1 and 2; Producer 6</i>
Adding value to local products	Giving value to products; quality products	<i>Executive 5; Producer 3 and 4</i>

Diversify tourism activity in the area	Diversifying active tourism by linking gastronomic/agricultural experiences; new market segment; complementing the entire tourist offer	<i>Executive 1 and 2</i>
Deseasonalise	Extending the season; attracting tourists who don't overcrowd; regulating summer crowds	<i>Executive 1, 3 and 4</i>
Regenerative tourism	Creating regenerative experiences	<i>Executive 1 and 3</i>
Economic and employment opportunities	Economic return to companies and workers; healthy economy; future for young people; providing economic future for local people; producers do not depend solely on production (economic diversification); selling local products at a fair price; preservation of agrosystem services	<i>Executive 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5; Producer 2, 3 and 4</i>
Biodiversity preservation	Working with mechanisms preserving biodiversity; helping to maintain a landscape	<i>Executive 1 and 5; Producer 1, 4, 5 and 6</i>
Focus on health	Recovering biological rhythms; health; return to the land	<i>Executive 3 and 5</i>
Brand promotion for producers	Making your product/activity known	<i>Producer 2, 3 and 6</i>

Table 2: agrotourism opportunities identified during the interviews

Some of the opportunities presented in the table had already been identified in *section 2* (literature review), namely economic and employment opportunities raised by Eagles et al. (2002), Liu et al. (2023), Blanco & González (2025), Fernández et al. (2023), and Csurgó et al. (2019); opportunities to diversify the tourism activity in the area (Yllatopa et al., 2025; Da Mota et al., 2024); opportunities to raise awareness on health-related aspects (Bell et al., 2007; Rivera, 2015; Campbell & López, 2012); the opportunity to add value to the destination (Agapito et al., 2016); the opportunity to add value to local products (Blanco & González, 2025; Williams, 2001) and the opportunity to preserve biodiversity raised by Blanco & González (2025). However, other opportunities, such as the chance to reduce seasonality, synergy with regenerative tourism, and a way to promote producer brands, are new opportunities not identified throughout the literature review. In particular, the opportunity to reduce seasonality appears to be closely linked to the reality of the territory and other Mediterranean contexts, which suffer greatly from peak tourist seasons, especially in summer periods. The opportunity to preserve biodiversity, although already identified in *section 2* (literature review), seems especially relevant within the natural park, where several producers express their role as protectors of the territory, stating that if their activity were to cease, much biodiversity would die with it, along with the maintenance of a human-modified natural landscape. This touches on the observations of Rodríguez (2019) who states that “natural elements and anthropological activity are related” (p. 63). Finally, some of the opportunities identified in *section 2* (literature review), such as cultural preservation, respect for traditions, and

the sustainable use of resources (Blanco & González, 2025), were not explicitly mentioned by participants when asked about the opportunities of the concept. However, these themes did emerge spontaneously during the interviews, showcasing that the participants were aware of them to some extent.

5.5.3 Identity and authenticity

All participants agree that the territory could benefit from an agrobiotourism approach based on local products from an identity and authenticity perspective. *Producer 1* explicitly points out that this identity and authenticity would be showcased “at the level of the typical Mediterranean landscapes and products”. *Executive 3* explains: “through culture and a little bit of the landscape, the importance of all these products and their authenticity is explained (you won't find them anywhere else)”. *Producer 2* directly links their product to the identity of the territory and boasts of their work in recovering native varieties. *Producer 4* states it clearly: “My product defines our territory; we harvest something that is only produced here”. *Producer 3* expresses it similarly: “It is a product of the Empordà, harvested from our fields, therefore, more authentic than this... Moreover, we produce native varieties.” Finally, *producer 7* gives a slightly different view and states that it is not only the product that identifies the territory but the way of thinking behind the used techniques, “I think it contributes a lot, techniques are specific to the territory, and not only techniques but concepts, it is a way of thinking too, it makes territory”.

Participants' responses demonstrate that they are aware of the value behind local products and their relationship with the authenticity and identity of the territory, which relates to the appreciations of Bessière (2001) and Mora (2020) allowing for a clear promotional strategy based on these specific ideas.

5.5.4 How agrobiotourism could diversify the tourist offer

Executive 1 affirms that “active tourism can be diversified by linking gastronomic and agricultural experiences”—thus complementing the active tourism offering of the natural park— while *executive 2* links it with a possible “branch of sustainable and respectful tourism”. *Executive 3* presents it as an appropriate strategy for the region and explains: “I have sun and beach, I have surroundings, a fabulous landscape included in a natural park, I have one of the most well-known historic centres in the region and if on top of that I have local products...”, presenting it as a win-win strategy. *Producer 6* warns of the dangers of relying too heavily on a single market segment, referring to sun and beach tourism, and states: “Sun and beach tourism is fine up to a point, but then it has to be filled with content”.

Taking into account the responses of the participants, the agrobiotourism strategy is perceived as a suitable strategy for the tourism diversification of the region, as already identified in the agrobiotourism opportunities section. This touches on the appreciations made by Yllatopa et al. (2025), Csurgó et al. (2019) and Da Mota et al. (2024) regarding the positive role of local and gastronomic products in the economic and tourist diversification of rural areas.

5.6 Block 5: Future vision and recommendations

5.6.1 Best possible scenario in 10 years

Executive 1 imagined a future in which there is a “very well-consolidated public-private network with specific action plans, and a perfectly coherent and coordinated offer that could position the destination as a place where people would come exclusively to practice ecotourism and learn about these experiences”. In contrast, *executive 2* takes the producer's point of view and imagines a future in which “producers can diversify their profit and product creating related establishments

and activities". In addition, it identifies an opportunity for employment of young people in the rural world and a way to achieve social, natural, and economic balance. *Executive 2* further mentions that this offer should be "economically accessible", distancing it from a premium product suitable only for certain types of markets. *Executive 3* also focuses on coordination and comments that she imagines "like a large company where all the gears are there, in which some feed off others." *Executive 4* shares part of the message regarding coordination and partnerships but also highlights the need to reduce administrative obstacles: "that everyone does their part and does not hold back; that there is more funding and fewer administrative obstacles; bet on associations and joint work; a clearer, realistic and open mentality." *Executive 5* emphasizes the need to recover landscapes that benefit the biodiversity of the natural park: "I would like agricultural policies to change a lot because they do not favour us at all and essentially... what we need here is to walk, as we are already doing, but which is very difficult towards the production of organic products. I wanted to be 99%, that the whole plain produced organic rice, we only have 1%. Therefore, that is very ambitious... but basically, it's nothing more than trying to recover some landscapes that we had in the 50s and 60s".

The vision of *producer 1* is "to extend the tourist season all year round as much as possible" (deseasonalise) as well as making the projects "environmentally and economically sustainable". They also imagine a future in which there are "fewer administrative hurdles" and "a truly efficient and agile administration". *Producer 2* is optimistic about what the tourism sector can offer them and points out: "Get 50% of tourist income and 50% of oil. We depend on the weather and we depend on many things and one year your harvest can go bad and if you can save yourself with the tourist part, then perfect. And without depending on it with a very high percentage, because if there is another pandemic...". *Producers 3, 5 and 7* offer a more production-focused perspective, distancing themselves from the tourist part of agrobiotourism. *Producer 3* mentions that they would like "tourists to consume more local products and participate even more in the experiences," but at the same time, they doubt whether they would continue offering tours if it weren't for the need to promote their product. They explain that if their product was already well-known and generating sufficient sales, they might stop offering them; although when asked, they acknowledge the value of the tours in helping to position their product. *Producer 5* states: "That they could come here to the dock, and be able to get to know our product, how we do it, and that they could taste it; but that's not my job, my job is to fish." *Producer 7* points out: "Our job is not a tourism thing, but if a more cultural type of tourism were to come, a tourism that seeks more about the history of the people, the history of the country... we could offer this tourism a lot of things; we could try to deseasonalise tourism and have a flow of people all year round, and I think we can offer this flow of people all year round quite a lot of things." However, *producer 4* offers the opposite view and regrets not being able to get more involved in the tourism sector. She explains that if she could, she would offer visits: "If I had the resources, I would make visits because normally everyone who has resources does it. That is something that helps sell the product too, you know?". Finally, *Producer 6* is positive about his current situation although he mentions administrative obstacles when trying to restore parts of his property: "We are quite happy. Although there are always things to improve. For example, we need to rehabilitate many parts of the mill. We can't show the century-old mill because it is falling apart. We don't have the permits".

The participants' imagined future 10 years from now is diverse and varied. However, most recurring themes include the improvement on collaboration, coordination and governance (*Executive 1, 3 and 4*), deseasonalisation (*Producer 1 and 7*), improvement on youth employment

and an opportunity to curb rural exodus (*Executive 2*), possibilities for producers' economic diversification (*Executive 2*; *Producer 2, 3 and 4*), fewer administrative obstacles (*Executive 4 and 5*; *Producer 1 and 6*), and a way to work towards landscape recovery (*Executive 5*). If noticed, on the one hand the raised issues focus on reducing the challenges preventing a stronger presence of local products (identified in *section 5.5.1*), while on the other hand they seek to amplify agrotourism opportunities identified in *section 5.6.2*.

5.6.2 Support needed

When asked about the support participants would need in order to reach the imagined future, answers directly point to the improvement of the identified obstacles in *section 5.5.1*. *Executive 1* highlights funding, critical and coherent thinking, and top-down management support as fundamental elements. *Executive 2* mentions financial support and qualified personnel, while *Executive 3* points to improved public-private sector relations, "Producers must remove the label that city councils are only there to give subsidies and that they are the ones (producers) who drive the local economy forward; the administration must have a much more entrepreneurial vision than it currently has creating a different governance model". *Executive 4's* vision lies in reducing administrative obstacles and increasing investment: "Reduce administrative obstacles and increase funding, so that the administration is rigorous, transparent, but much simpler and more agile."

Producer 3 focuses on aid in matters of promotion and marketing while proposing that establishments would be given extra incentives if they opt for the use of local products. *Producer 4* also focuses on promotion and marketing issues and mentions improving connections with tourist offices, support from larger umbrellas, and marketing support (above all). *Producer 6* follows the same line of thought and states: "Especially that the tourist offices would make the typical experiences of the territory known. Sometimes what happens is that with so many activities, what is truly typical of here gets buried under other activities. We need to promote the typical activities." He also praises initiatives already carried out but criticizes their short run: "There is already a Montgrí Natural Park website, that is good. We pushed hard for it. Also, the brochure of ecotourism experiences, which is good, but once they had it done there was no money to print it", showcasing a lack of funding or a lack of organization.

Following the analysis of the responses, the support necessary for participants to achieve their imagined future has been categorized according to the following themes: financial (regarding to funding and financial support), human resources (regarding qualified personnel), marketing and promotion (regarding product awareness, connections with tourist offices and visibility), governance rethinking (regarding a more entrepreneurial administration approach and reduced administrative obstacles), and the existence of incentives for establishments promoting local products.

6. Discussion

The previous section (5. *Results*) focused on presenting the results of 12 semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders of the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park, as well as connecting these results with the information collected in the literature review section. The goal was to analyse the perceptions, opportunities and barriers that various stakeholders attribute to the development of a tourism strategy based on agrotourism and local products within the park territory. However, the following section focuses on highlighting the main key findings of the research while also offering recommendations for putting agrotourism

initiatives into practice—initiatives that seek to respond to local conditions initiatives and to diversify the tourism offer of the natural park in a sustainable way.

6.1 Main key findings

Duality between public and private sectors

The results show that the public sector is slightly more optimistic regarding the current perception of the supply of local products within the park territory. Statistics show that, both in terms of the mean and median, the public sector gives higher scores than the private sector: 3.2 and 1.79, respectively (for the mean) and 3 and 1.5, respectively (for the median). However, considering the overall mean and median of 2.38/5 and 2/5, it can be stated that the current presence of local products in the region's tourism offerings is low-to-moderate. This difference between the perceptions of the administration and the producers stems from the information provided by their responses. While the public sector highlights existing and emerging initiatives that may be related to agrotourism and the development of local products, the private sector tends to measure its impact based on how these initiatives affect product sales or generate interest in the experiences they provide (if any).

However, the duality between the public and private sectors extends beyond the perception of the local product offerings. Responses to the question "Extent to which agrotourism could be applied in the territory" also reveal clear differences. The public sector offers forward-looking answers or outlines the conditions necessary for its proper implementation, such as "a good approach towards the future" (*Executive 3*) and "if it is economically efficient and if there is investment and aid when making this change" (*Executive 2*). The reality among producers is different. Many of them claim to be working spontaneously within agrotourism's parameters, even though they are not fully aware of its terminology or the underlying concepts. This represents a key finding, as the effort required to implement such a strategy would be less than expected taking into account the spontaneous involvement of the producers themselves.

Duality between mass tourism (sun and beach) and nature-based tourism

Participants unanimously agree on the region's tourism profile, indicating that it relies heavily on mass sun and beach tourism, where some visitors may not even realize they are in a natural park (*Executive 5*). However, the responses from the various participants also reveal a growing demand—"a growing interest that is taking root" (*Executive 2*)—for sustainable activities connected to the land and more environmentally and regionally conscious, indicating the increasing presence of nature-based tourists in the area. One of the research's significant findings is that these nature-based tourists value the landscape and experience behind their chosen product more than the product itself. Although the literature review had already identified experiences and territory as an enhancing element of local products and agrotourism (Blanco & González, 2025; Williams, 2001), the role that a pleasant rural-natural landscape—compared to an urban one—plays in the agrotourism strategy had not yet been addressed.

Different producer profiles

Another finding not identified during the literature review is the degree of variety regarding the producers' profiles. Although most producers are actively engaged with tourism, the responses demonstrate that not all producers are interested in direct contact with tourists but rather accept it passively, either because they lack the means to actively engage in it or because they are more focused on production. This finding is particularly significant, as it implies that local development

policies failing to account for the diversity of producer profiles are unlikely to succeed. Traditional literature often treats producers as a homogeneous group, assuming a shared interest in integrating tourism strategies with production activities. However, empirical evidence demonstrates the coexistence of distinct producer profiles, differentiated by their level of involvement and available resources.

Based on these criteria, producers can be classified as follows: (1) producers who are deeply involved in developing an agrobiotourism strategy—they have the will, staff and necessary infrastructure to proactively design and market experiential experiences (*Producer 1* and *6*); (2) producers with an intermediate profile—they accept the tourist part of their activity passively or instrumentally as a lesser evil or an economic necessity to consolidate the price of their product, admitting that they would prefer to dedicate themselves exclusively to production if the global market allowed them to do so (*Producer 2* and *3*); and (3) producers who prefer to focus solely on production, avoiding direct interaction with tourists either because they lack the necessary structural resources—such as time or family-based staffing—or due to a professional identity that prioritizes productive activities over tourism (*Producer 4, 5* and *7*).

Given the variety of profiles, the agrobiotourism strategy should respect the denial of the “pure producer” to participate in the tourist activity when that refusal stems from professional identity reasons while developing actions supporting those profiles that, due to resource constraints, are unable to offer experiential experiences. At the same time, “intermediate” producers should be encouraged to continue providing their tourism experiences by means of product price consolidation and income diversification measures while enhancing the existing and emerging experiences of the “highly motivated” producer group.

Opportunities for a strategy based on agrobiotourism and local products in the Montgri, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park

Although most of the opportunities identified for developing an agrobiotourism strategy related to local products are outlined in *section 5.5.2*, a summary of all opportunities identified throughout whole *section 5* (Results) is provided below. The aim is to offer a clear, concise, and unified explanation gathering all identified opportunities.

The opportunities include: (1) maintaining the landscape, biodiversity and environment of the territory—a worth highlighting aspect in the case of natural parks due to their strong conservation commitment as well as among producers, who position themselves as protectors of the territory; (2) promoting lesser-known professions, that may be underrepresented in developed countries, unlike Latin American developing countries where most of the literature on agrobiotourism originates; (3) adding value to local products—whether by stabilizing or even increasing their prices through meaningful experiences, highlighting the connection between territory and product, or producing high-quality goods that stand apart from the global agricultural system; (4) creating a unique value proposition compared to brands focused solely on production; (5) enhancing the tourist experience and destination’s image; (6) diversifying the tourism offerings within the territory; (7) deseasonalisation—especially relevant both in the Costa Brava region where the case study is located and in the Mediterranean context; (8) fostering synergies with regenerative tourism; (9) enhancing economic diversification and job opportunities, both among producers and throughout the territory; (10) improving consumer’s health; (11) promoting the brands of local producers; and (12) strengthening the authenticity and identity of the region. Although some of these opportunities were already identified in *section 2* (literature review),

others emerge as new opportunities not previously detected in the theoretical framework—all of them specified in *section 5.5.2*.

Regarding the specific characteristics of the case study, of the complete set of opportunities, it is worth highlighting opportunity (1) on maintaining the landscape, biodiversity and environment of the territory; opportunity (2) on promoting lesser-known professions; and opportunity (7) on deseasonalisation. The opportunity on maintaining the landscape, biodiversity and environment of the territory appears to be especially relevant within the context of a natural park due to their strong conservation commitments as well as among producers, who throughout the interviews, position themselves as protectors of the territory, stating that if their activity were to cease, much biodiversity would die with it, along with the maintenance of a human-modified natural landscape. This makes the existence of the producers vital for the correct conservation of the natural protected area, in which a tourism strategy based on agrobiotourism and local products could ensure the economic diversification of producers—who struggle to fit into a global agricultural system with high market and scale barriers—ensuring the continuity of their role as protectors of the territory. The opportunity to promote lesser-known professions was not detected in the literature review, which may point to a difference between Latin American countries and developed nations regarding the continuity of these occupations—specifically, that such professions are more widely unknown in developed countries. Finally, the opportunity to reduce seasonality seems closely linked to the reality of the case study, located in the Costa Brava region, and other Mediterranean contexts which suffer greatly from peak tourist seasons (especially in summer periods), which offers an opportunity for deseasonalisation and tourist diversification provided that the territories possess the raw materials needed to develop a tourism strategy grounded in agrobiotourism and local products.

Challenges preventing a strategy based on agrobiotourism and local products in the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park

Although together, the aforementioned opportunities offer a promising picture, the following are the challenges hindering a correct full exploitation of a strategy based on agrobiotourism and local products in the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park. The aim is to offer a clear, concise, and unified explanation gathering all identified challenges mainly explained in *section 5.4.1* and *5.4.2*.

The full list of challenges includes: (1) structural and capacity barriers—which primarily relate to lack of time, infrastructure, personnel or funding; (2) communication, visibility and marketing—mainly centred on insufficient coherence and unity in the communication strategy, pointing to the need for a unified message around agrobiotourism and local products; (3) private and public will—both on the part of least involved producers and on the part of the public sector, from which greater willingness is required to adopt an encouraging approach toward private companies; (4) administrative and legislative barriers—either because of a complex administrative and legislative situation or because of the lack of real policies protecting small producers; (5) economic barriers—mainly related to the difficulty of selling products with higher prices, which reinforces the importance of uniting territory and unique meaningful experiences when it comes to the promotion of local products; (6) market and scale barriers—which relates to the difficulty producers face in penetrating a structural global market, showcasing a need to think collaboratively at both the marketing and distribution levels; (7) conflicts of interest between park administration and producers—mainly related to the classical natural areas dichotomy between protection and conservation versus use and development; and (8) lack of coordination, dialogue

and collaboration—not only between municipalities, producers, and the natural park separately, but also as a joint governance structure.

Offering a clear, concise, and unified explanation gathering all identified challenges is particularly valuable for two reasons. First, the existing literature usually focuses on the benefits provided on the proper development of local products in natural-rural areas. However, studies examining the difficulties encountered when implementing these models are less common, especially within the areas of influence of natural parks. Second, detailing each of the identified challenges enables the recommendation of actions that can help overcome some of these barriers along with the own assessments made by the interviewees themselves in *section 5.4.3*, which will be developed in the following section.

6.2 Practical recommendations

Below there are detailed recommendations for a correct practical implementation of agrobiotourism initiatives and the promotion of local products in the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park. These initiatives are intended to respond to the local conditions of the territory and contribute to the sustainable tourism diversification of the area based on the information collected throughout the case study.

Recommendation 1: Create a multi-stakeholder governance table including all key stakeholders

Although abandoning the strategy of engaging with the "Made in the Park" brand would be inappropriate—given that many natural parks are choosing to adopt it—it is recommended to create an additional partnership including local producers (with representation of the three identified profiles: highly involved, intermediate, and pure production), the municipalities included in the natural park and the natural park administration itself. Such a measure is necessary because the “Made in the Park” brand alone would exclude municipalities’ perspectives.

Therefore, this partnership should be created with the aim of building a solid governance structure that incorporates all relevant stakeholders and seeking to improve fluid coordination, dialogue, and collaboration, as it is presented as one of the main barriers for the correct development of the agrobiotourism strategy in the territory. It is recommended that the table meets quarterly and that its first objective was to design the collaboration agreement proposed by *Producer 5* (similar to fishermen's guild statutes).

Recommendation 2: Implement fiscal incentives for establishments promoting local products

The municipalities within the natural park's territory could consider offering economic incentives—specifically tax reductions—to establishments such as hotels and restaurants that are committed to promoting local products, as suggested by *Producer 3*. This measure would help alleviate the price barriers—noted by different participants—currently preventing the full integration of these products into the area's tourist offerings.

A proper strategy to implement it would be to agree on lowering local taxes—such as the tax on economic activities or waste collection—for establishments demonstrating that a specific minimum percentage of their products are coming from park-based producers (to be agreed among administrations).

Recommendation 3: Design an agrobiotourism manual adapted to three identified producer profiles

The creation of a manual on how to develop agrobiotourist experiences in the territory is presented as an adequate strategy in order to promote a culture of innovation among producers. The manual should be edited in 3 different versions taking into account the different profiles of producers identified in *section 6* (Discussion) in relation to its degree of involvement in the agrobiotourism strategy. These manuals should focus on reducing structural and capacity barriers (time, staff, and funding) and promoting a unified, homogeneous discourse around local products. It is recommended that they be distributed in digital format and that their content be consulted with the Local Development and Employment Promoter figure (highly valued among interviewees).

Recommendations adapted to the different profiles could include information on advanced marketing and the creation of joint experiences with other producers for highly involved producers; information on how to consolidate the price of their products through the proper design of sensory-based and experiential experiences, and on how to efficiently manage time and staff resources for intermediate producers; and information on how to properly refuse to directly participate in the tourist activity without losing visibility for pure producers.

Recommendation 4: Create a joint marketing and distribution cooperative

A key barrier preventing a greater presence of local products in the territory's tourist offerings are structural and capacity barriers—whether they originate from time, infrastructure, staff or funding—especially among small scale producers. The creation of a cooperative enabling producers to join efforts on marketing and distribution related aspects—starting to function as a hive instead of as individuals—could increase their visibility and recognition within the region and could help them to overcome not only structural and capacity barriers but also market and scale barriers. The natural park administration and the municipalities could study the possibility of offering funding and legal advice to form said cooperative.

Recommendation 5: Study the Natural Park of the Volcanic Zone of La Garrotxa as a reference model

The model of the Natural Park of the Volcanic Zone of La Garrotxa was noted by various stakeholders as a solid governance structure pointing the way forward. A study trip is proposed to collect information on La Garrotxa governance model, including the participation of the natural park, municipal representatives and interested producers. The idea would include the identification of coordination, collaboration and shared leadership related aspects that could be adapted to the reality of the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park—together with an action plan to improve the governance structure of the park territory.

6.3 Final reflections

As a final reflection it is recommended to consult technical decisions with producers as much as possible. These possess extensive knowledge of the territory, provide first-hand information about successes and failures, as well as what works and what does not, based on the direct economic impact on the sale of their products or the consumption of their agrobiotourism experiences, thus ensuring the correct management and placement of investments and subsidies.

Although these measures do not ensure the complete dissolution of the barriers preventing a correct implementation of the agrobiotourism strategy and the promotion of local products in the territory, they do seek to mitigate the challenges identified during the investigation. In addition, they seek to offer actionable useful ideas for the different stakeholders, hoping that these will be useful in the near future.

7. Conclusions

This final master's thesis aims to analyze the perceptions, opportunities and barriers that various stakeholders attribute to the development of a tourism strategy based on agrobiotourism and local products as a tourism diversification strategy in the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park. To achieve this, 5 sub-objectives were set, including: (1) to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding agrobiotourism, its relationship with nature tourism typologies and contemporary tourism trends; (2) to examine the role of local products as agrobioeconomic tourist resources, their capacity to enhance destination authenticity and to create memorable visitor experiences; (3) to analyse the specific context of the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park in relation to agrobiotourism and the development of local products; (4) to explore stakeholder perspectives on the opportunities and challenges associated with developing such strategy in the park territory; and (5) to develop practical recommendations for its implementation specifically tailored to meet local conditions and to contribute to sustainable development in the area.

The *first* sub-objective was addressed through the information presented in the literature review section. This established a comprehensive theoretical framework demonstrating that agrobiotourism emerges from the combination of 3 different concepts—agriculture, bioeconomy and tourism (Blanco & González, 2025). Unlike traditional agrotourism, existing literature examined how its focus on technical-scientific processes is what sets agrobiotourism apart. While agrotourism traditionally focuses on experiencing rural life and agricultural activities, agrobiotourism further focuses on appreciating and understanding the scientific, technological and sustainable processes behind it, helping in this way to maximize the value of new bioproducts and bioservices.

The literature also examined how agrobiotourism relates to the different types of nature tourism and to nature tourism itself. The similarities with nature tourism rely on the fact that both take place in and draw value from natural, rural, and agricultural landscapes, while the similarities with rural tourism, ecotourism, and adventure tourism rely on their connection to agriculture, primary sector practices, and the appreciation of traditional ways of life in sparsely populated areas; on their emphasis on sustainability and their commitment to environmental stewardship, cultural interpretation, and education; and on participatory experiences based on caring for the body and mind with a special focus on health, escaping routine and stress, and contact with nature.

Regarding its connection with different contemporary tourism trends, literature demonstrates how agrobiotourism is related to sustainable tourism due to its commitment with environmental protection along with long-term sociocultural development and sustainable economic growth; and with regenerative tourism due to their shared interests in creating net positive effects, actively contributing to environmentally sustainable practices and improving the quality of life in host communities. The literature review has also demonstrated connections between agrobiotourism and the emerging trends of authenticity, experiential travel, and the rise of locally sourced products. These connections rely on the offering of unique, genuine, and meaningful experiences; on the tourists' participation and active protagonist role; and on the use of gastronomic and artisanal goods as symbols of identity and differentiation. Thus, the literature review demonstrates that agrobiotourism is not an isolated tourism modality but is related to the aforementioned tourism modalities and contemporary tourism trends.

The *second* sub-objective was also addressed through the information presented in the literature review section. The theoretical framework demonstrated that local gastronomic and artisanal products can be considered agrobioeconomic tourist resources. The contributions of Bessi re (2001) and Williams (2001) establish that local products function as elements through which to “express territory”, acting as identifiers of regional traditions, cultural heritage, and community identity—in this way increasing the value of local products themselves. Moreover, the literature review demonstrated that local products are tools for enhancing the authenticity of destinations and creating memorable tourist experiences through two interrelated concepts: experiential tourism and storytelling techniques. First, experiential tourism allows for the creation of tourist experiences that place the tourist in a protagonist role, while at the same time enhances the sensory and emotional aspects of the experiences themselves (Rivera, 2013; Agapito et al., 2016). Second, storytelling techniques help to create narratives around the history, culture, nature, and local people behind each product and experience, thus helping to transform these products into memorable and authentic tourist experiences (Korez-Vide, 2017; Vu, 2022), aligning with the overall philosophy of agrobiotourism.

The *third* sub-objective was addressed through the information presented in *section 4*, which analysed the specific context of the natural park in relation to agrobiotourism and local product development. As specified in *section 4*, the natural park already possesses an inventory of local products showcasing its long-standing agricultural traditions. The different local products identified include: the Montgr  olive oil, artisanal fishing, Pals rice, Girona apple, Montgr  wines, L’Escala anchovy, Montgr  honey, aromatic herbs, and wicker crafts. Together, these products serve as motivators for the creation of emerging initiatives related to the territory, local producers, and tourism; which among others include the “ s del Montgr ” project (promoting local products in empty commercial premises), a dedicated park website listing all local producers, the recently joined “Made in the Park” brand, several gastronomic days, and the Pals rice cultural train. The analysis confirms that the territory of the natural park combines protected natural areas, a diversity of local products, proximity to existing tourist markets, and a long-standing agricultural tradition, which in turn justifies the chosen case study and allows the exploration of the perceptions, opportunities and barriers that various stakeholders attribute to the development of a tourism strategy based on agrobiotourism and local products in the natural park area.

The *fourth* sub-objective is directly related to said stakeholders’ exploration of the perspectives, opportunities and challenges associated with developing such strategy in the park territory. To address it, the research focused on a qualitative and interpretive analysis, which was carried out through 12 semi-structured interviews with various key stakeholders, including park management, local development officers, municipal tourism officials, and local producers. In addition, a quantitative question was included regarding the current presence of local products in the territory, with the intention of assessing the current starting point for the agrobiotourism strategy and the promotion of local products.

The first finding revealed a significant duality between the perceptions of the public and private sectors. While the public sector is moderately more optimistic than the private sector, with a mean and median of 3.2/5 and 3/5, respectively, the private sector is more critical and skeptical regarding the integration of local products, with a mean and median of 1.79/5 and 1.5/5, respectively. The duality stems from the different ways in which the situation is assessed. On the

one hand, the public sector justifies its responses by highlighting existing or emerging initiatives. On the other hand, the private sector justifies its responses in relation to the direct economic impact on their productive activities and the level of engagement with their offered experiences.

The second finding identified an existing duality between traditional mass sun and beach tourism—deeply rooted in the territory—and the emergence of an increasingly nature-based tourism more conscious of the land and sustainability related aspects. It was found that these tourists value the landscape and experience behind their chosen product more than the product itself, which complements existing literature on the importance of a rural-natural landscape and on the importance of complete sensory-based emotional experiences as enhancing elements of agrobotourist products.

The third finding revealed the existence of 3 different producer profiles in relation to their level of engagement with the tourism industry: (1) producers highly involved in the design and marketing of agrobotourism experiences; (2) intermediate producers who accept tourism passively or instrumentally, usually out of economic necessity; and (3) pure producers who focus exclusively on production, either due to a lack of resources or professional identity issues. The finding is particularly noteworthy since existing literature often treats producers as a homogeneous group, assuming their equal interest in participating in the agrobotourism strategy. However, reality shows a variety of profiles that must be considered and correctly tailored when developing an effective agrobotourism strategy.

The fourth finding identified a wide range of opportunities associated with the development of an agrobotourism strategy and with the promotion of local products in the park territory. These include: (1) maintaining landscape, biodiversity and environmental values; (2) promoting lesser-known professions; (3) adding value to local products; (4) unique value proposition compared to only-producers brands; (5) enhancing the tourist experience and destination image; (6) diversifying the tourism offer; (7) reducing seasonality; (8) fostering synergies with regenerative tourism; (9) generating economic diversification and employment; (10) improving consumer health; (11) promoting producer brands; and (12) strengthening regional authenticity and identity. Of all the listed opportunities, (1) maintaining landscape, biodiversity and environmental values, and (7) deseasonalization stand out for their special relevance to the case study, located in a protected natural area with a strong seasonality pattern concentrated mainly in the summer months. Furthermore, the opportunity to showcase lesser-known professions point to a difference between Latin American countries (from where most of the literature on this topic originates) and developed nations regarding the continuity of primary sector occupations—specifically, that such professions remain widely unknown in developed countries.

The fifth finding classifies the barriers that hinder greater integration of agrobotourism and local products in the tourist offer of the natural park. These include: (1) structural and capacity barriers (time, infrastructure, staff, and funding); (2) communication and marketing deficiencies; (3) insufficient public and private willingness; (4) administrative and legislative complexities; (5) economic barriers (price competition); (6) market and scale barriers; (7) conflicts of interest between park administration and producers (the classic conservation vs. use dilemma); and (8) a lack of coordination, dialogue and collaboration across all stakeholders. The detailed presentation of these barriers is particularly valuable given that existing literature usually focuses on the benefits provided on the proper development of local products in natural-rural areas. However,

studies examining the difficulties encountered when implementing these models are less common, especially within the areas of influence of nature reserves. Furthermore, it has allowed for the recommendation of different actions aiming to overcome the aforementioned challenges—which has been addressed in the fifth sub-objective.

The *fifth* sub-objective has been based on the findings themselves. 5 recommendations allowing the correct implementation of the agrobiotourism strategy and local products in the territory have been proposed. These include: (1) creating a multi-stakeholder governance table including all key actors (producers, municipalities, and park administration) in order to improve coordination and collaboration related aspects; (2) implementing fiscal incentives for establishments promoting local products, helping to overcome price barriers; (3) designing an agrobiotourism manual adapted to the three producer profiles identified—offering tailored information in relation to the different levels of engagement; (4) establishing a joint marketing and distribution cooperative to overcome structural and capacity barriers, and market and scale barriers; and (5) studying the Natural Park of the Volcanic Zone of La Garrotxa as a reference governance model. Together, these measures seek to mitigate the challenges identified during the research along with the offering of actionable useful ideas, hoping that these will be useful in the near future.

In conclusion, the research presents agrobiotourism and local products, understood as agrobioeconomic tourist resources, as a promising strategy for diversifying the current tourism offerings of the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park and its buffer area. It has been demonstrated that the natural park has the necessary resources—including agricultural traditions, a rich variety of local products, emerging initiatives, and a growing segment of nature-based tourists—in order to develop this strategy. However, its success depends on overcoming the different barriers identified, especially the structural and capacity barriers that small producers face; the lack of unified, consistent and homogeneous communication and marketing strategy; and the lack of a governance structure with solid foundations allowing for a shared leadership model. One key element to highlight is the spontaneous participation of several producers in the agrobiotourism strategy, even without formal knowledge of the term itself. This suggests that its implementation is already underway, which would involve significantly lower costs than those of building an entirely new infrastructure from scratch. Overall, an agrobiotourism strategy based on developing tourist experiences and the integration of local products has demonstrated to be appropriate as long as it respects the diversity of producers, promotes genuine collaboration among different stakeholders, and highlights the specific qualities of the territory through experiential tourism and storytelling techniques. This author hopes that the information gathered during this research will contribute to the proper development of such a strategy fostering the sustainable and regenerative development of the park and the communities within it.

8. Future lines of research and limitations

8.1 Future lines of research

The previous master's thesis explored the perceptions, opportunities, and barriers related to the development of an agrobiotourism strategy and local products in the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park. However, the research still leaves room for future lines of research to be considered.

Firstly, it is proposed to complement the exploratory and qualitative study of this research with a quantitative analysis confirming the existence of the different producer profiles identified in this

document (highly involved, intermediate, and pure producer). This study should focus on gathering a significant sample of producers not only from the Montgrí, Medes Islands, and Baix Ter Natural Park but also from other Catalan or Mediterranean natural protected areas allowing for statistical generalization. Some of the variables that could be studied include: the variety in the profiles in relation to proximity to tourist markets, the size of the production centers, or the type of product.

Secondly, the previous study did not take into account the perspective of tourists. For this reason, a study combining qualitative and quantitative methods is proposed to investigate the perceptions of tourists visiting the Montgrí, Medes Islands, and Baix Ter Natural Park regarding the development of agrobiotourism strategies and local products. The study could also be extended to other Catalan or Mediterranean protected natural areas and could focus on exploring tourists' payment willingness, the importance these assign on various aspects of the experience (storytelling, tastings, guides, or quality and sustainability certifications), and how this may vary in relation to market segments (sun and beach tourism vs. more nature-based tourism)—along with any other variables the authors consider to be relevant.

Thirdly, during the research, various stakeholders identified the Natural Park of the Volcanic Zone of La Garrotxa as a model to follow. Therefore, a comparative analysis is proposed between the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park and the Natural Park of the Volcanic Zone of La Garrotxa. The analysis should aim to explain the reasons for the success of this protected natural area (e.g. governance structure or marketing strategy). Furthermore, the study could include an analysis of other European protected natural areas with similar success stories that could inform the replication of policies and actions across different nature reserves.

Finally, it would be interesting to replicate the research, including the interviews and the rating-scale question, ten years from now. This would allow the analysis of whether the recommended actions have been implemented and to what extent have they been successful or not. In addition, it would also allow the analysis of whether the perception of the presence of local products has changed and whether the identified barriers have evolved—thus taking into account the changing reality of the territory.

8.2 Limitations

Regarding the limitations of the thesis, four constraints must be taken into account. Firstly, the study is based on a single case study, meaning that the research findings may not be easily transferable to other protected areas. The Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park has unique characteristics, such as its coastal location and its dependence on mass sun and beach tourism, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other nature reserves.

Secondly, although the sample size ($n=12$) is considered sufficient to reach data saturation, it remains relatively small. Furthermore, the research does not take into account the perspectives of tourists or other key stakeholders, such as hotel or restaurant representatives. These were mainly cited by producers as barriers to product positioning, particularly due to price-related issues. Thus, their perception would have been valuable in enriching the research through the inclusion of additional perspectives.

Thirdly, the exploratory and qualitative approach of the research allowed the effective collection of information regarding the perceptions of the different stakeholders. However, due to the smallness of the sample ($n=12$), the quantitative question cannot be statistically generalized. As

a result, these findings should be interpreted as indicative information rather than conclusive information.

Finally, the profiles of certain stakeholders may have influenced their responses to some extent, especially regarding collaboration or the current presence of local products in the region. It's important to note that they were aware of the expected response—a willingness to collaborate—which could have altered their genuine intentions in this regard. Furthermore, the differences in profiles among municipalities and producers also played a significant role in assessing the presence of local products in the region. Municipalities with a greater abundance of local products and more successful producers tended to give higher scores. Therefore, the stakeholders' contextual differences should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

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10. Appendices

Agricultural Engineer of the Montgrí, Medes Islands and Baix Ter Natural Park INTERVIEW

BLOCK 1: Context, Role, and Economic Activity

1. As agricultural engineer of the natural park, how long have you held this position and what are your main responsibilities?

Possible follow-up question: To learn a little more about your work, what are the main areas you're currently focusing on?

2. Could you describe the main economic activities (agriculture, fishing, farming, craftsmanship...) that are currently most present within the park territory and its surrounding area?
3. How would you describe the current relationship between the park's administration and local producers?
4. What role do local products currently play in the park's visitor experience? For example: visibility in restaurants, visitor centres, educational activities, workshops...
5. On a scale from 1 to 5, how would you rate the current presence of local products in the park's tourism offer?

BLOCK 2: Visitors, Demand, and Opportunities

6. How would you describe the profile of visitors who come to the park?
7. To what extent do you perceive real visitor demand for *experiences* related to local products? For example: rice field visits, honey-harvesting demonstrations, olive oil tastings, craft workshops...
8. What opportunities do you foresee for developing sensory or experiential activities based on local products within the park?

Possible follow-up question: Which products or areas do you think have the greatest potential?

BLOCK 3: Barriers, Coordination, and Governance

9. In your opinion, what are the main obstacles preventing local products from becoming more integrated into the park's tourism offer? For example: Regulations? Carrying capacity? Lack of coordination? Production volume? Lack of interest of key stakeholders?

10. How would you assess coordination/dialogue between the park, local producers, and the tourism sector (whether public or private)?

Possible follow up- question: What works well? What could work better?

11. In your view, what conditions would be necessary for producers, the park, and the tourism sector (whether public or private) to improve joint governance and shared leadership?

BLOCK 4: Theoretical Concepts - Agrobiotourism, Identity, Diversification, and Sustainability

12. The concept of agrobiotourism combines agriculture, bioeconomy, and tourism. To what extent do you think this approach could be applied in the park?
13. How do you think the natural park could benefit from an agrobiotourism approach based on local products in terms of identity and authenticity?
14. And what about diversifying the current tourist offer? How do you think an agrobiotourism approach based on local products could contribute to diversifying the current tourist offer of the Natural Park?
15. What environmental risks or limits do you foresee if agrobiotourism activities were to increase within the park? For example: carrying capacity, mobility issues, impact on habitats...

BLOCK 5: Future Vision and Recommendations

16. In an ideal scenario with sufficient resources, how would you imagine the relationship between local products, the tourism sector (whether public or private), and the Natural Park 10 years from now?
17. What kind of support or changes (regulations, communication, infrastructure, management...) would be essential to make this vision a reality?

CLOSING

18. In your opinion, what is the most valuable contribution that agrobiotourism and local products could bring to the Natural Park?
19. To conclude, is there anything important that we haven't covered and that you think should be included in the research?

Local Development and Employment Promoter of the municipalities within the Natural Park

INTERVIEW

BLOCK 1: Context, Role, and Economic Activity

1. To begin, could you explain how long you have been the Local Development and Employment Promoter of this area and what are the main responsibilities of the role?

Possible follow-up question: To learn a little more about your work, what are the main areas you're currently focusing on?

2. Which economic activities would you say are currently most relevant within the municipalities of the Natural Park?

Possible follow-up question: What about agriculture, fishing, farming, craftsmanship...?

3. How would you describe the current relationship between local administrations and local producers?

4. What role do local products currently play in the visitor experience of these municipalities? For example: visibility in restaurants, visitor centres, educational activities, workshops...

5. On a scale from 1 to 5, how would you rate the current presence of local products in the municipalities tourism offer?

BLOCK 2: Visitors, Demand, and Opportunities

6. What types of visitors frequently come to the municipalities that you represent?

7. To what extent would you say that they are interested in consuming local products or in participating in *experiences* based on this type of products?

8. What opportunities do you foresee for developing sensory or experiential activities based on local products in the area?

Possible follow-up question: Which products or areas do you think have the greatest potential?

BLOCK 3: Barriers, Coordination, and Governance

9. Which challenges prevent local products from having a stronger presence in the tourism offer of the different municipalities that you represent? For example: Marketing issues? Accessibility? Production volume? Lack of training? Lack of interest of key stakeholders?

10. How would you evaluate coordination/dialogue between the park, local producers, and the tourism sector (whether public or private)?

Possible follow-up question: What works well? What could work better?

11. What mechanisms would be necessary to improve joint governance and shared leadership among producers, the park, and the tourism sector (whether public or private)?

BLOCK 4: Theoretical Framework - Agrobiotourism, Identity, and Diversification

12. The concept of agrobiotourism combines agriculture, bioeconomy, and tourism. To what extent do you think this approach could be applied in the territory?
13. How do you think the territory could benefit from an agrobiotourism approach based on local products in terms of identity and authenticity?
14. And what about diversifying the current tourist offer? How do you think an agrobiotourism approach based on local products could contribute to diversifying the tourist offer of the municipalities that you represent?

BLOCK 5: Future Vision and Recommendations

15. In the best possible scenario, and if you had the ideal resources and support, how would you imagine the relationship between local products, the tourism sector (whether public or private), and the Natural Park 10 years from now?
16. What type of support do you think producers and municipalities need in order to move towards this ideal future?

CLOSING

17. What is, in your view, the main value that agrobiotourism and local products could bring to the territory?
18. To conclude, is there anything important that we haven't covered and that you think should be included in the research?

Heads of Tourism Departments of the municipalities within the Natural Park INTERVIEW

BLOCK 1: Municipal Context, Role, and Tourism Profile

1. To begin, could you explain how long you have been the Head of the Tourism Department of this municipality and what are the main responsibilities of the role?
2. Now, could you explain what is the tourism profile of your municipality, who are your typical visitors and what brings them here?
3. Which local products—gastronomic or artisanal—would you say that best represent your municipality?

4. Currently, how are these products presented or promoted to visitors?
For example: municipal website, shops, restaurants, local markets, existing routes...
5. On a scale from 1 to 5, how would you rate the current presence of local products in the municipality's tourism offer?

BLOCK 2: Demand, Opportunities, and Collaboration

6. Taking into account the different types of visitors that you welcome in your municipality, to what extent do you observe interest in local products or related experiences?
7. Which opportunities do you foresee for developing experiential or sensory based activities involving local products in your municipality?
8. To what extent do you foresee opportunities to collaborate with producers, other municipalities, tourism businesses, or the Natural Park to create a joint "local product route" or shared network of experiences?
9. What factors would you consider essential for this collaboration to be feasible?

BLOCK 3: Barriers, Coordination, and Governance

10. From your perspective, what are the main obstacles preventing local products from becoming more integrated into your municipality's tourism offer?
11. How would you assess the coordination/dialogue between producers, the Natural Park, tourism businesses, and the municipality?

Possible follow-up question: What works well? What could be improved?
12. What mechanisms would be necessary to improve joint governance and shared leadership among producers, the park, tourism businesses, and the municipality?

BLOCK 4: Theoretical Framework - Agrobiotourism, Identity, and Diversification

13. The concept of agrobiotourism combines agriculture, bioeconomy, and tourism. To what extent do you think this approach could be applied in the territory?
14. How do you think your municipality could benefit from an agrobiotourism approach based on local products in terms of identity and authenticity?
15. And what about diversifying the current tourist offer? How do you think your municipality could benefit from this approach in terms of diversification strategies far beyond your main tourism offer?

BLOCK 5: Future Vision and Recommendations

16. In the best possible scenario, and if you had the ideal resources and support, how would you imagine the relationship between your municipality, the Natural Park, tourism businesses, and local producers 10 years from now?
17. What type of support do you think producers and municipalities need in order to move towards this ideal future?

CLOSING

18. In your opinion, what is the most valuable contribution that agrobiotourism and local products could bring to the territory?
19. To conclude, is there anything else that we haven't discussed that you think should be included in the research?

Local Producers from the Natural Park

INTERVIEW

BLOCK 1: Activity and Relationship with the Territory and the Tourism Industry

1. To begin, could you explain your activity, what do you produce, and what is the story behind your product?
2. What does a typical day—or season—look like in your production process? Could you explain it from start to finish?
3. Who are your current main clients? For example: Local residents? Restaurants? Shops? Direct sales to tourists?
4. To what extent do you currently have contact with tourists? In what situations? For example: do they ever visit your farm/workshop, or do you sell your products in places where tourists shop?
5. On a scale from 1 to 5, how would you rate the current presence of local products in the area's tourist offer?

BLOCK 2: Demand, Opportunities, and Collaboration

6. From your point of view as a producer, to what degree would you say visitors have interest in local products or related experiences?
7. To what extent do you think visitors understand and appreciate the value, tradition, and work behind your product?
8. Which part of your production process do you think visitors would find most interesting to see or learn about?
9. Have you ever offered, or considered offering, visits, workshops, or other experiences related to your product? What motivated or discouraged you?

10. To what level would you be interested in collaborating with other producers, the Natural Park, tourism businesses, and the surrounding municipalities to create combined experiences?

11. What factors would you consider essential for this collaboration to be feasible?

BLOCK 3: Barriers, Coordination, and Governance

12. What challenges or frustrations, if any, have you encountered when trying to sell to the tourism sector or collaborate with it?

13. How would you assess the coordination/relationship between the Natural Park, the tourism sector (whether public or private), and you (as a local producer)?

Possible follow-up question: What works well? What could be improved?

14. What mechanisms do you think would be necessary to improve joint governance and shared leadership among the tourism sector (whether public or private), the park, and producers?

BLOCK 4: Theoretical Framework - Agrobiotourism and Identity

15. The concept of agrobiotourism combines agriculture, bioeconomy, and tourism. To what extent do you think this approach could be applied in your production?

16. How do you think your product, understood from an agrobiotourism approach, could contribute to the territory's identity and authenticity?

BLOCK 5: Future Vision and Recommendations

17. In the best possible scenario, and if you had the ideal resources and support, how would you like tourism to contribute to your business 10 years from now?

18. What kind of support would you need to create or improve tourism experiences in this future case scenario? For example: training, permits, marketing support, connections with tourism offices or restaurants...

CLOSING

19. Putting tourism aside for a moment, what are you most proud of regarding your product and the way you create it?

20. Is there anything else you would like to add about the future of local products or advice for improving the connection between producers and the tourism sector in the area?