administrative sciences

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Analysis of the Economic, Labour, and Management Effects of COVID-19 on Rural Accommodation: An Application to a Rural European Province (Cáceres, Spain)

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the consumption habits of tourists to benefit sustainable destinations that are not overcrowded, such as rural tourism destinations. However, the periods of compulsory lockdown have had devastating effects on tourism businesses operating in rural areas and have even jeopardised their economic viability. The aim of this article is to quantify in relative terms the effects that the period of compulsory lockdown in a markedly tourist country, such as Spain, between March and May 2020 has had on rural accommodation in one of the most rural provinces of Spain (Cáceres). Based on a random sample of 225 rural accommodation establishments and the consideration of various factors, statistical techniques of comparison of means and proportions were used to detect differences in the intensity of the effects of the compulsory lockdown on the economic-financial management, bookings, facilities, and input of rural accommodation establishments in the province. The results obtained show that the economic, labour, and management effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural tourism businesses in the province of Cáceres have been very substantial. In particular, the businesses with the highest level of tourist services on supply, i.e., those that, in addition to accommodation, also offer other tourist activities, have been the most affected. In view of this situation, urgent emergency measures have been put in place at a provincial level to alleviate the economic loss and the destruction of jobs caused by this pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19 effects; labour market; Cáceres; mean comparison; proportion comparison; political actions

Citation: Sánchez-Rivero, Marcelino, Mª Cristina Rodríguez-Rangel, Paloma García Cerro, and Ana Mª Manjón García. 2022. Analysis of the Economic, Labour, and Management Effects of COVID-19 on Rural Accommodation: An Application to a Rural European Province (Cáceres, Spain). *Administrative Sciences* 12: 57. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci12020057

Received: 18 March 2022
Accepted: 30 April 2022
Published: 4 May 2022

1. Introduction

One of the most pressing problems facing rural areas today is depopulation (Brooks 2020; Ubels et al. 2020) owing to the process of transformation from a predominantly agricultural society to an urban and industrial society (Li et al. 2019).

At the same time, and precisely because of this process of the urbanisation of society, the rural environment is increasingly in demand as a means of entertainment, relaxation, and leisure. This situation has led to the fact that rural tourism has contributed to the improvement of the well-being of the rural population and has stimulated the development of rural areas (Romanenko et al. 2020). In particular, tourism activity in rural areas, in addition to generating economic growth, has also contributed to promoting the agricultural sector and the production of local handicrafts, improving environmental conditions, and preserving the cultural heritage and local traditions. For all these reasons, the development of rural tourism can be considered to be one of the possible solutions to the problems of rural areas, such as depopulation, population ageing, or the lack of infrastructure (Ghaderi and Henderson 2012).

However, tourism has been the economic sector most affected by the pandemic. The effects of COVID-19 on international tourism have been devastating (Gössling et al. 2020; Prideaux et al. 2020) to the extent that mobility restrictions and economic uncertainty have significantly affected 80% of tourism service providers (Richards and Morrill 2020). Added to this is the fact that by its very nature of moving people from an origin to a destination, tourism has contributed to the spread of the pandemic (Farzanegan et al. 2020; Vaishar and Šťastná 2020), which is why its revival will only be possible when the herd immunity of the world's population has been achieved.

While it is true that the mobility restrictions have affected the entire tourism sector as a whole, it is to be expected that the impact will not be equal for all tourism products. In this sense, it can be expected that those tourist destinations characterized by a specialized offer in less-massified tourism products, such as rural tourism, may find in this post-COVID period an opportunity for development.

Niewiadomski (2020) pointed out that the forced "deglobalization" imposed by the restrictions has favoured the development of inland tourism. For their part, Chebli and Ben Said (2020) point to a series of changes in tourist behaviour, which can be summarized as choice of less popular destinations, renunciation of group travel, increase in travel insurance, and a greater tendency to travel in the low season, among others. The characteristics of this tourism in the post-COVID period undoubtedly seem to offer an opportunity for less-massified typologies to take off, especially in the case of emerging destinations, which seem to adjust in some aspects to the new requirements of the demand.

However, in order to take advantage of this opportunity, it is essential for destinations to have sufficient tourist infrastructure, so in this context, it is essential to delve into the impact that the compulsory closure imposed as a measure to restrict the pandemic at the national level in Spain has had on the tourist business fabric. It is evident that, due to the characteristics of the tourist offer in different types of destinations, the impact should have different characteristics in turn. However, there are no studies that have analyzed the impact of COVID-19 on emerging destinations specializing in less-crowded typologies, such as rural tourism, at least to the authors' knowledge.

Therefore, in order to complete this research gap, this paper aims to investigate the impact of the compulsory closure on a rural tourism destination, taking as a case study the province of Cáceres in Extremadura (Spain). This is an emerging inland region with a tourist offer centred on cultural and natural tourism, being, in fact, one of the most genuinely rural European provinces and where rural tourism has the greatest economic importance.

It is based on the premise that the smaller size of its companies and its smaller workforce may have influenced the economic impact of the crisis and, therefore, that these companies are more resilient in the face of the COVID-19 crisis.

In order to achieve its objectives, the paper presents the following structure. Section 2 analyses the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on rural economies from different perspectives and then focuses on the effects on tourism in general and rural tourism in particular in these territories. Section 3 then briefly presents the case study in addition to the data used in this research and the statistical methodology used for its analysis. Section 4 discusses the results obtained, differentiating between the economic effects, the effects on employment, and the effects on the management of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural tourism. Finally, Section 5 highlights the main conclusions reached and presents the measures, which, for the case study analysed, have been taken by public administrations to reactivate rural tourism, which is so important for the socio-economic development of rural areas.

2. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Rural Economies

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant effect on rural economies, causing negative impacts in the medium and long term (Phillipson et al. 2020) from an economic, employment, and social point of view.

From an economic perspective, the pandemic is causing the interruption of the supply chain of products or services to the businesses and inhabitants of rural areas owing to the limitation of supplies of products considered essential and the prioritisation of supply to the most populated areas. On the other hand, the paralysis of economic activity in many sectors is causing labour layoffs (Ma et al. 2020), which in most cases take the form of a reduction in the income of families living in rural areas and insecurity as to their economic solvency. Another economic effect of the pandemic in rural areas is the transformation of consumption patterns from out-of-home consumption to in-home consumption, which requires very limited or non-existent home delivery logistics in rural areas (unlike in large cities). In addition, rural-based businesses with activities conditioned by the import or export of goods or services, such as agricultural businesses, are experiencing great difficulties in getting their products to market as a result of the disruption of ports, airports, and ferry routes (Phillipson et al. 2019).

From the employment point of view, in addition to the labour layoffs mentioned above, the pandemic is leading to the replacement of face-to-face work by working from home. However, teleworking is much more difficult in rural areas where access to high-quality broadband Internet is more difficult and technically limited.

Furthermore, from a socio-cultural perspective the population in rural areas is very old, and it is precisely the elderly who are most in need of health services, as they are the most vulnerable to the coronavirus (Wu and McGoogan 2020). However, the scarcity of health services (doctors, emergency services, pharmacists, etc.) in these rural areas represents a major threat to the health of this population compared to the population in urban areas. In addition, the forced social isolation of people over 70 years of age makes them dependent on the remainder of the population to do their shopping or obtain their medical products without having to leave their homes (Phillipson et al. 2020). This requires the existence of social enterprises and volunteers to perform these tasks, which are much less frequent in rural areas than in urban areas. On the other hand, the disruption of social relationships and the inability to participate in community events in rural areas is also leading to mental health problems (World Health Organization 2020), which are more pronounced among the older population. Furthermore, access to education, culture, and shopping, which have been channelled almost exclusively online during confinement, is becoming much more complicated in rural areas due to the poor quality of Internet bandwidth and mobile phone coverage problems. Finally, for younger people, the impact of the pandemic in rural areas has shown itself in the form of isolation from friends and schoolmates, lockdown in very small and dispersed communities, and frustration with poor-quality Internet access and mobile phone coverage (Phillipson et al. 2020).

In the field of tourism, although the sector has faced numerous crises in the past, the COVID-19 crisis is expected to be the most damaging of all (Assaf and Scuderi 2020; Karabulut et al. 2020; Dolnicar and Zare 2020). One of the expected consequences of COVID-19 is the loss of value of hotels, airlines, shipping companies, and car rental companies (Sharma and Nicolau 2020). In addition, however, because of the indirect and induced effects that tourism has on other economic sectors and on employment (Williams and Kayaoglu 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic will have an unprecedented socio-economic impact.

The COVID-19 pandemic will also change the future behaviour of tourists. Thus, according to Baba et al. (2020), the popularity of tourism modes requiring less human-to-human contact will increase, foreign travel will be reduced in favour of domestic travel, short trips that reduce the risk of infection will be preferred to longer trips, and the popularity of small, traditional travel agencies will fall in favour of online travel agencies.

In the specific case of rural tourism, the scientific literature has widely highlighted its role as a tool for economic development and as a factor, which helps to improve the quality of life of the population living in rural areas (Petrović et al. 2017; Su et al. 2018; Martínez et al. 2019). In addition to these structural effects of rural tourism on the rural environment, the COVID-19 pandemic has also generated certain positive effects (which are more or less

conjunctural depending on the final duration of the pandemic). In particular, the search for less crowded and more sustainable destinations by tourists to avoid infection has led after the end of the periods of population lockdown to an increased demand for rural tourism (Zhu 2020).

However, not all the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural tourism have been positive. It should be noted that the periods of lockdown of the population, which have been more or less extensive depending on the country, have led to an absolute standstill in the production of rural tourism businesses (Zhu 2020). This production stoppage has resulted not only in cancellations and refunds of accommodation bookings but also in redundancies (temporary or permanent) of workers, financial problems for the companies, difficulties in the management of the facilities, etc.

Some authors suggest that the pandemic represents a historic moment to change tourism, in which it is possible to propose a new approach (Corbisiero and La Rocca 2020) and thus overcome some of the problems that threatened the sustainability of the activity, such as climate change, the high seasonality associated with this economic activity, or the phenomenon known as overtourism.

Seasonality can be defined as the temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, which is demonstrated by various dimensions such as visitor numbers, visitor expenditure, traffic flows, and employment and price fluctuations (Butler 1994).

Some of the consequences of this imbalance in demand can be summarized as degradation of facilities due to exploitation in high seasons, loss of profitability due to periods of inactivity, and instability in the hiring and retaining of staff (Jolliffe and Farnsworth 2003; Page et al. 1999; Park 2013).

Several studies have analyzed the seasonality of different tourism activities, concluding that the degree of maturity of the sector (Nadal et al. 2004) and the tourism typology are factors that can influence a destination to have a higher seasonality index and proposing the creation of mixed-tourism segments in destinations as a strategy to mitigate its effects (Benur and Bramwell 2015; Butler 2001; Lee et al. 2007; Jurdana and Zmijanovic 2014).

Being a recurrent problem in the tourism literature, there have been different proposals made by various authors to mitigate seasonality. Some authors synthesize some of the main proposals as follows: hosting events and festivals, market diversification, product diversification and a structural and holistic response (Baum and Hagen 1999; Benur and Bramwell 2015; Lee et al. 2007).

For their part, Pham et al. (2018) focused on analysing this phenomenon in the case of rural tourism, concluding that the size of the companies, which in this sector are predominantly SMEs, can lead to these measures not being effective. In fact, the particularities of rural tourism must necessarily be taken into account when designing strategies that are effective for the intended purpose. After concluding their study, these authors suggest the following recommendations: diversify the product portfolio by relying on peripheral attractions, facilitate and monitor cooperative marketing actions and packaging, and raise awareness among SMEs of their interdependence in tourism and the need to be proactive while involving them in the destination's tourism planning.

Overtourism can be defined as excessive negative impact on host communities and the natural environment (Koens et al. 2018). In the pre-pandemic period, it was a booming phenomenon that particularly affected mature destinations and was widely discussed both in the public and scientific spheres as one of the main threats to be faced by tourism (Martín Martín et al. 2018; Martins 2018; Milano 2018; Benner 2019, 2020; González-Pérez 2020).

One of the main problems of overtourism is that it modifies the environmental, economic, and social conditions required for the tourism sustainability of any development model (Blanco-Romero et al. 2018). Therefore, it should be especially taken into account in those tourism products that are developed in areas that are highly sensitive to environmental impact, as in the case of rural tourism.

To mitigate this effect, it is important to take into account the concept of the carrying capacity of a destination and to develop models that allow it to be respected (Bertocchi et al. 2020).

The arrival of COVID-19 interrupted a growing trend in tourism worldwide, and with this halt in activity, some of the problems that plagued tourism have been paralyzed and attenuated. However, despite the current situation of the sector, it should be borne in mind that, as analyzed by Kim and Suh (2021), overtourism could reappear. Therefore, this decline in activity should serve to rethink the future of tourism and propose models that allow for sustainable development of the destinations (Escudero Gómez 2018).

As recommended by the United Nations World Tourism Organizations (2020), the actions to be taken by destinations to overcome the COVID-19 crisis are managing the crisis and mitigating the impact, providing stimulus and accelerating recovery, and preparing for tomorrow. It is precisely this last action that must be taken into account in order to generate sustainable development models that allow the creation of wealth, employment, and welfare for the territories.

This research aims to quantify the magnitude of these negative effects on businesses in an emblematic rural tourist destination in Spain, i.e., the province of Cáceres. To this end, data deriving from a questionnaire issued by the Provincial Council of Cáceres during the period of total lockdown of the population were used together with statistical tools linked to comparisons of means and proportions. Details of the materials and methods used are given in the next section of this paper.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Case Study

The case studied in this paper is that of the province of Cáceres, located in the southwest of Spain, with a population on 1st January 2020 of 391,850 inhabitants, distributed over a surface area of 19,868 km^2 and therefore with a population density of 19.72 inhabitants/km^2. Article 3 of Spanish Law 45/2007 of 13th December 2007 on the sustainable development of the rural environment defines the latter as the geographical space formed by the aggregation of municipalities with a population density of less than 100 inhabitants/km^2. Consequently, the province of Cáceres as a whole is a markedly rural province.

On the other hand, according to the population of the municipalities the Spanish National Institute of Statistics considers as rural those municipalities with a population of 10,000 inhabitants or less. These rural municipalities are in turn classified into intermediate rural municipalities (if their population is between 2000 and 10,000 inhabitants) and small rural municipalities (if their population is less than 2000 inhabitants). The province of Cáceres has a total of 223 municipalities, of which, according to the definition of the Spanish National Institute of Statistics, 219 are rural municipalities (98.2% of the total). Of these, only 23 are intermediate rural municipalities; the vast majority of rural municipalities are small ones (196). Consequently, it can be concluded that the rural character of the province of Cáceres and of the vast majority of its municipalities is beyond doubt; this makes the case studied in this paper a paradigmatic case for the study of rural tourism.

In the 219 rural municipalities of the province of Cáceres, in January 2020, there were a total of 1018 tourist accommodation establishments, of which the vast majority (661) were of a rural nature. The predominance of casas rurales (holiday cottages) in this group of rural accommodation establishments is overwhelming, as these cottages (616) represent 93.2% of the total with only 2 rural apartments and 43 rural hotels (6.5% of the total).

3.2. Questionnaire and Sample

The data analysed in this article were obtained from a study carried out by the Provincial Council of Cáceres between 22nd April and 1st May 2020, i.e., one month after the mandatory lockdown of the population in Spain (which began on 14th March and lasted about 3 months). This study, entitled "The impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector in

the province of Cáceres", was based on a questionnaire completed by a total of 707 tourism businesses in the province selected at random from the population. Of this total number, this article worked with the sub-sample of rural accommodation (225 establishments). Taking into account that the rural accommodation in the province of Cáceres at the beginning of the year 2020 amounted to 661 establishments, the 225 establishments analysed represent 34% of their number. The maximum sampling error committed, for the worst-case scenario where p = q = 50%, is 5.62%.

One of the questions in the questionnaire was formulated as follows: "If your company existed in 2019, what was your turnover in the second quarter of that year (April–June)?" The aim of this question is to obtain an approximation of the turnover that rural accommodation in the province of Cáceres would have obtained during the second quarter of 2020 if there had been no compulsory lockdown of the population. Consequently, the answer to this question represents the loss of quarterly turnover under the assumption of a constant turnover in the years 2019 and 2020. The number of replies to this question was 143, which gives an average turnover value of EUR 19,022. This means that the average impact of COVID-19 on the turnover of companies in the sector was over EUR 19,000 during the quarter, i.e., more than EUR 6000 per month. Obviously, this average value can hide very significant differences depending on certain characteristics (factors) of rural accommodation. The aim of this paper is to identify such differences if they exist.

Another objective of the questionnaire was to find out how many workers (in those cases, i.e., 163, in which the rural accommodation establishments had contracted employees) have been affected by a reduction in working hours, by a temporary layoff, or by dismissal from work as a result of COVID-19. From these figures, it is possible to determine which average percentage of workers has been affected to a greater or lesser extent in their employment relationship with rural accommodation in the province. These average percentages were 3.5% for reduction in working hours, 27.3% for a temporary layoff, and 9.2% for dismissal from work. In the following sections of this article, we will analyse whether these average percentages are the same for the different categories of the factors considered.

A third objective of the questionnaire was to find out the difficulties faced by rural tourism entrepreneurs in the province as a result of compulsory lockdown. To this end, respondents were offered a list of 11 items related to business management in order to identify the problems encountered during the most acute stage of the coronavirus by means of a multiple-choice question (giving the possibility of ticking several items). These 11 items were grouped into the following four categories:

- Economic-financial management (4 items);
- Booking management (2 items);
- Facilities management (3 items);
- Input management (2 items).

The results obtained show that the greatest impacts on management were those related to booking management (an average percentage of 78.9%) and economic-financial management (51.6%) and, to a much lesser extent, facilities management (27.0%) and input management (12.9%). However, these average percentages can vary significantly when considering different factors.

Finally, and given that the statistical objective of this study is to compare quantitative values and proportions according to the characteristics of the rural accommodation analysed, three variation factors were considered since, in the authors' opinion, they are those that could register the greatest differences in terms of levels. These three factors and their associated levels are as follows:

- "Level of tourist service" factor:

  Level 1: Accommodation only;
  Level 2: Accommodation + other tourist activities.

- "Commitment to employment" factor:

Level 1: No workers in the establishment;
Level 2: With workers in the establishment.

- "Business format" factor:

Level 1: Self-employed;
Level 2: Company.

3.3. Methodology

Given the quantitative nature of the turnover of rural accommodation, which has been used to assess the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in this sector, and taking into account that all the factors considered have two groups or levels, the methodology used to test the equality of mean values empirically at these levels was the *t*-test. As is well-known, the empirical value of this *t*-test is given by the following equations (depending,, respectively on whether the population variances are equal or different):

$$t - \text{value} = \frac{\overline{X}_1 - \overline{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{(n_1-1)\ S_1^2+(n_2-1)\ S_2^2}{n_1+n_2-2}\left(\frac{1}{n_1}+\frac{1}{n_2}\right)}}$$

or

$$t - \text{value} = \frac{\overline{X}_1 - \overline{X}_2}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{S_1^2}{n_1}+\frac{S_2^2}{n_2}\right)}}$$

in which $\overline{X}_1$ and $\overline{X}_2$ are the mean sample values; S_1^2 and S_2^2 are the respective sample quasi-variances; and n_1 and n_2 are the sample sizes obtained in each group. Thus, if the $t-$value lies in the (bilateral) region of rejection of the hypothesis of equality of population mean values, a *p*-value of less than 0.05 should be obtained (a significance level used with all the statistical tests carried out in this research).

Given the binomial nature (presence/absence) of the effects of COVID-19 on employment and on business management, the methodology used to determine whether these effects have shown themselves with the same intensity at the two levels of the different factors considered was the *Z*-test for equality of proportions, the empirical value of which is obtained as follows:

$$z - \text{value} = \frac{\overline{p}_1 - \overline{p}_2}{\sqrt{\overline{p}_C\ (1-\overline{p}_C)\left(\frac{1}{n_1}+\frac{1}{n_2}\right)}}$$

in which $\overline{p}_1$ and $\overline{p}_2$ are the proportion of the presence of effects at factor levels 1 and 2, respectively; n_1 and n_2 are the respective sample sizes; and $\overline{p}_C$ is calculated as follows:

$$\overline{p}_C = \frac{x_1 + x_2}{n_1 + n_2}$$

with x_1 and x_2 being the number of cases at factor levels 1 and 2, respectively in which the effect was present.

If the above empirical value (which is asymptotically normally distributed by application of the Central Limit Theorem) lies in the (bilateral) region of rejection, the *p*-value associated with it will be less than 0.05, leading to rejection of the initial hypothesis that the two proportions compared are equal.

4. Results

4.1. Economic Effects

To start the analysis with the economic effects, Table 1 shows the result of the *t*-tests performed considering the three factors presented above. As can be seen, the three factors

introduce significant differences between the mean values. The largest differences are therefore recorded in the "level of tourist service" factor, in which the establishments that only offer accommodation had an average loss of turnover of more than EUR 44,000, while those that in addition to accommodation also offer other tourist activities recorded an average loss of turnover of just over EUR 10,000.

Table 1. Comparison of mean values of lost turnover during the second quarter of 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Factor	Mean Value (EUR)	Diff. (EUR)	*t*-Value	Signif. (2-Tail)
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	44,202	33,969	3.552	0.001
Accommodation + other tourist activities	10,233			
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	6889	−15,355	−4.038	0.000
With workers	22,244			
Business format:				
Self-employed	13,833	−14,001	−2.058	0.043
Company	27,834			

Source: own work.

The "commitment to employment" factor also shows statistically significant differences between the means since the average turnover loss of establishments employing workers (EUR 22,244) is substantially higher than that of those not employing workers (EUR 6889). Finally, the smallest difference observed, although also statistically significant (p-value of 0.043), occurs with the "business format" factor, which means that businesses run by the self-employed have recorded an average turnover loss in the second quarter of 2020 of almost EUR 14,000, while those run under a business formula have recorded turnover losses which are twice as high (EUR 27,834).

Consequently, the economic effects of COVID-19 on rural accommodation in the province of Cáceres have been very disparate, with the level of tourist service, commitment to employment, and business format having a notable influence on this dispersion.

4.2. Emloyment Consequences

Table 2 presents the employment consequences of COVID-19 for workers in rural accommodation in the province of Cáceres, differentiating for each category of the "level of tourist service" and "business format" factors. To focus the analysis on the first factor, the differences in proportions between establishments only offering accommodation and establishments complementing their offer with other tourist activities are not significant for workers affected by the reduction of working hours, but they are significant for those who have suffered redundancy (p-value: 0.047) and above all for those who have been affected by a temporary layoff plan (p-value: 0.009). Specifically, in establishments only offering accommodation, the percentage of workers who have suffered redundancy stands at 6.57% of the workforce, while this percentage rises to 15.40% in establishments offering accommodation and other activities. The difference is even greater among those affected by a temporary layoff plan since this percentage of workers is 22.32% in businesses offering only accommodation but rises to almost 39% in those offering accommodation and complementary activities.

Table 2. Comparison of proportions of workers in rural accommodation affected by the COVID-19 mandatory lockdown.

	Level of Tourist Service		Business Format	
	Accommodation Only	**Accommodation + Other Tourist Activities**	**Self-Employed**	**Company**
(a) Reduction in working hours:				
Observed proportion	0.0380	0.0279	0.0146	0.07
Difference		+0.0101	−0.0554	
Z-value		+0.380	−1.906	
Signif. (2-tail)		0.704	0.057	
(b) Temporary layoff plan:				
Observed proportion	0.2232	0.3893	0.2044	0.3912
Difference		−0.1661	−0.1868	
Z-value		−2.609	−2.981	
Signif. (2-tail)		0.009	0.003	
(c) Dismissal from work:				
Observed proportion	0.0657	0.1540	0.1078	0.0654
Difference		−0.0883	+0.0424	
Z-value		−1.983	+1.256	
Signif. (2-tail)		0.047	0.209	

Source: own work.

In turn, when considering the "business format" factor, it can be seen that only the percentage of workers affected by a temporary layoff plan shows significant differences (*p*-value: 0.003) in the two levels of this factor. Specifically, in self-employed rural accommodation establishments that have hired workers, more than 20% of them have been affected by a temporary layoff plan, a percentage that doubles (39.1%) in businesses managed by a company.

4.3. Management Effects

As mentioned above, the analysis of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of rural accommodation in the province of Cáceres has been divided into four categories. The results obtained for each of these categories are discussed below.

Firstly, Table 3 presents the statistical comparison of the proportions between levels of the three factors for the four aspects used to analyse the effects of COVID-19 on the economic-financial management of rural accommodation. As can be seen, the lack of liquidity and cash flow was the aspect in which the factors generated the greatest differences. The Z-test is therefore statistically significant for these three factors considering a significance level of 5%. The largest differences are observed in the "level of tourist service" factor, with proportions ranging from 38.24% of establishments offering only accommodation to 61.82% of establishments offering accommodation and other activities, while the smallest differences, although these are also significant, are recorded between establishments without workers (32.26%) and establishments with workers (48.48%).

Table 3. Comparison of proportions of the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on the tourism management of tourist accommodation A: economic-financial management.

Factor	Proportion	Diff.	*Z*-Value	Signif. (2-Tail)
Lack of liquidity and cash flow				
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	0.3824			
Accommodation + other tourist activities	0.6182	−0.2358	−3.063	0.002
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	0.3226			
With workers	0.4848	−0.1621	−2.188	0.029
Business format:				
Self-employed	0.3826			
Company	0.5526	−0.1701	−2.431	0.015
Difficulty in paying suppliers				
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	0.3176			
Accommodation + other tourist activities	0.5455	−0.2278	−3.036	0.002
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	0.2581			
With workers	0.4172	−0.1591	−2.205	0.027
Business format:				
Self-employed	0.3289			
Company	0.4605	−0.1317	−1.931	0.053
Payment of loans and debts already acquired				
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	0.3529			
Accommodation + other tourist activities	0.6545	−0.3016	−3.931	0.000
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	0.3387			
With workers	0.4601	−0.1214	−1.645	0.100
Business format:				
Self-employed	0.4027			
Company	0.4737	−0.0710	−1.018	0.308
Payment of fixed business expenses				
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	0.7824			
Accommodation + other tourist activities	0.9455	−0.1631	−2.750	0.006
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	0.7742			
With workers	0.8405	−0.0663	−1.162	0.245
Business format:				
Self-employed	0.8121			
Company	0.8421	−0.0300	−0.557	0.577

Source: own work.

The "difficulty in paying suppliers" aspect shows statistically significant differences for the "level of tourist service" and "commitment to employment" factors but not for the "business format" factor. Specifically, a difference in proportions of almost 23 percentage points is recorded for the "level of tourist service" factor (31.76% when only accommodation is offered; 54.55% when accommodation and other activities are offered) and almost 16 points for the "commitment to employment" factor (25.81% when no workers are employed in the accommodation; 41.72% when workers are employed).

In the last two aspects used to quantify the effects of COVID-19 on the economic-financial management of rural accommodation, "payment of loans and debts already acquired" and "payment of fixed business expenses", the only factor that introduces significant differences is the "level of tourist service". Indeed, while establishments offering

only accommodation were affected by difficulties associated with the payment of loans and debts already acquired in 35% of cases and by problems in the payment of fixed business expenses in 78% of cases, these percentages rise in establishments offering accommodation and other activities to 65% and 94%, respectively.

The analysis of the effects of COVID-19 on the management of bookings was based on two aspects: the cancellation of bookings and reimbursement of bookings. The comparison of the proportions of establishments affected by this situation for the three factors considered is shown in Table 4. Since, as can be seen, the return of bookings does not register significantly different proportions in any of the levels of the three factors, it can be concluded that the overall average percentage (69.3% of establishments affected by the return of bookings) is valid for all types of rural accommodation regardless of their level of tourist service, their commitment to employment, and their business format.

Table 4. Comparison of proportions of the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on the tourism management of tourist accommodation B: booking management.

Factor	Proportion	Diff.	*Z*-Value	Signif. (2-Tail)
Cancelation of bookings				
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	0.8529			
Accommodation + other tourist activities	0.9818	−0.1289	−2.599	0.009
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	0.8871			
With workers	0.8834	0.0037	0.077	0.939
Business format:				
Self-employed	0.8658			
Company	0.9211	−0.0553	−1.227	0.220
Return of bookings				
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	0.7000			
Accommodation + other tourist activities	0.6727	0.0273	0.381	0.703
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	0.7258			
With workers	0.6810	0.0448	0.651	0.515
Business format:				
Self-employed	0.7047			
Company	0.6711	0.0336	0.518	0.605

Source: own work.

In relation to the cancellation of bookings, statistically significant differences are only observed between establishments only offering accommodation (85.29%) and those offering accommodation and other activities (98.18%), which means that the latter have been significantly more affected than the former in this matter.

The facilities management of rural accommodation in the province of Cáceres has also been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but generally speaking, this effect has not been significantly different in the various establishments according to the three factors considered (Table 5). Therefore, the percentage of rural accommodation establishments affected by problems related to the maintenance of facilities or the suspension of works/adaptations/contracted renovations did not show statistically significant differences according to the level of tourist service, commitment to employment, or business format. Only the problems deriving from the obligation to pay rent registered different percentages of affected establishments but only according to the level of tourist service offered by the same given that only 3.53% of the businesses only offering accommodation have had problems with the payment of rent, while this percentage is almost nine times higher (27.27%) in those businesses offering accommodation and tourist activities.

Table 5. Comparison of proportions of the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on the tourism management of tourist accommodations C: facilities management.

Factor	Proportion	Diff.	*Z*-Value	Signif. (2-Tail)
Obligation to pay rent				
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	0.0353			
Accommodation + other tourist activities	0.2727	−0.2374	−5.262	0.000
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	0.0323			
With workers	0.1166	−0.0843	−1.942	0.052
Business format:				
Self-employed	0.0738			
Company	0.1316	−0.0578	−1.408	0.159
Maintenance of facilities				
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	0.5471			
Accommodation + other tourist activities	0.6727	−0.1257	−1.640	0.101
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	0.5323			
With workers	0.5951	−0.0628	−0.853	0.394
Business format:				
Self-employed	0.5705			
Company	0.5921	−0.0216	-0.311	0.756
Suspension of works/adaptations/contracted renovations				
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	0.1353			
Accommodation + other tourist activities	0.1455	−0.0102	−0.190	0.849
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	0.1290			
With workers	0.1411	−0.0121	−0.235	0.814
Business format:				
Self-employed	0.1477			
Company	0.1184	0.0292	0.602	0.547

Source: own work.

To conclude this analysis of the impacts on tourism management, we drew up Table 6, which contrasts the equality of proportions in two aspects related to input management for the different levels of the factors considered. As can be seen, the problems of the supply of raw materials have manifested themselves with the same intensity in all types of rural accommodation so that neither the level of tourist service, nor the commitment to employment, nor the business format are responsible for the fact that this effect has shown itself with different intensity in some types of accommodation than in others.

This is not, however the case with the loss of perishable goods, in which both the level of tourist service and the commitment to employment are responsible for significant differences between one accommodation type and another. Specifically, while businesses only offering accommodation have experienced losses of perishable goods in only 14.71% of cases, those offering accommodation and other tourist activities have been affected by this problem in 56.36% of cases. There is also a relatively high difference in the percentage of rural tourism accommodation establishments, which have suffered losses of perishable goods when the accommodation has not hired staff (8.06%), compared with when it has hired workers (31.29%).

Table 6. Comparison of proportions of the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on the tourism management of tourist accommodation D: input management.

Factor	Proportion	Diff.	*Z*-Value	Signif. (2-Tail)
Loss of perishable goods				
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	0.1471			
Accommodation + other tourist activities	0.5636	−0.4166	−6.211	0.000
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	0.0806			
With workers	0.3129	−0.2322	−3.600	0.000
Business format:				
Self-employed	0.2282			
Company	0.2895	−0.0613	−1.006	0.315
Raw material supply problems				
Level of tourist service:				
Accommodation only	0.0118			
Accommodation + other tourist activities	0.000	0.0118	0.808	0.419
Commitment to employment:				
No workers	0.000			
With workers	0.0123	−0.0123	−0.876	0.381
Business format:				
Self-employed	0.0067			
Company	0.0132	−0.0064	−0.487	0.626

Source: own work.

5. Conclusions

The analysis carried out in this paper has made it possible to determine the economic, labour, and management consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural accommodation in an eminently rural Spanish province such as Cáceres.

In this sense, the loss of turnover during the second quarter of 2020 as a consequence of the compulsory lockdown of the population mainly affected tourism businesses with contracted workers and that only offer accommodation. This profile corresponds mainly to rural hotels and holiday cottages offered together in tourist complexes. On the other hand, self-employed entrepreneurs who do not employ workers and offer other tourism activities in addition to accommodation have registered a lower loss of turnover. This profile corresponds basically to small tourist concerns offering, in particular, leisure activities in the rural environment normally managed by a single person and in which accommodation is considered more as a complementary or additional service than as a main or unique one.

Therefore, it appears that the smaller size of the firms and smaller labour force has contributed to a greater resilience to the COVID-19 crisis. This finding seems to contradict some of the assumptions traditionally associated with rural tourism, which highlights the greater weakness of the sector in the face of economic crises due to its greater difficulty in accessing sources of financing (Pham et al. 2018).

On the other hand, the most frequent labour effects have been temporary layoffs in tourism companies offering accommodation and complementary activities (around 39% of them have been affected). These temporary layoffs have had much less effect (around 21%) on rural guesthouses with self-employment, which only offer accommodation.

Furthermore, the most determining factor in the differences detected in the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of rural accommodation in the province is the "level of tourist service" since it has been empirically confirmed that, in general, businesses offering both accommodation and other tourist activities have encountered more difficulties in management than other businesses offering accommodation only.

Faced with this difficult situation, during the second half of 2020 and the first half of 2021, the tourism administration of the province of Cáceres introduced emergency measures to reactivate the rural tourism economy. One of these measures has been that of tourist and

solidarity vouchers, with discounts of up to 50% (financed by the public administrations: Junta de Extremadura and Provincial Council of Caceres) on the price of rooms (or the entire establishment) in rural accommodation in the province and travel agency packages. The aim of these tourist vouchers is to reactivate tourism consumption at the end of the summer and in the autumn of 2020 and in the winter of 2021. This aid package has been endowed with an amount of EUR 2.58 million in the province of Cáceres, of which EUR 300,000 have taken the form of solidarity vouchers for health workers responsible for the major medical and healthcare work carried out during the worst moments of the pandemic. In addition, given the extension of the pandemic, this programme of tourist vouchers (initially valid until 31st March 2021) has been extended for the remainder of 2021 and will be valid until 31st January 2022. The success of this programme is demonstrated by the fact that 223 tourism companies signed up for solidarity vouchers and 411 signed up for tourist vouchers.

On the other hand, rural tourism companies in the province of Cáceres can also take advantage of the 15 measures of the Plan for the Reactivation of the Tourism Sector in Extremadura of the Directorate General of Tourism of Extremadura, which was endowed with EUR 10.1 million and approved in July 2020. Although this Plan applies to the region, most of its actions are aimed at the province with the most tradition and tourist importance, i.e., the province of Caceres. Some of the actions of this plan are aimed at alleviating some of the negative effects suffered by rural accommodation during the pandemic, such as the granting of zero-interest microcredits to tourism businesses (an action endowed with EUR 2 million), tourism security in the face of COVID-19, aid to tourism associations, and tourism promotion plans.

As can be seen, the measures developed are in line with the recommendations established by the United Nations World Tourism Organizations (2020); on the one hand, demand is being stimulated, while direct aid is being offered to companies to mitigate the effects of the crisis. It remains to be evaluated what work is being done by managers to prepare the destination for the post-COVID scenario, planning for the sustainable development of the destination.

One of the limitations of this work is the impossibility of comparing the results obtained with similar studies since there is no previous similar research, at least to the authors' knowledge, given the novelty of the topic to be addressed. However, Vaishar and Šťastná (2020) developed a preliminary study on the impact of COVID-19 on rural tourism in Czechia. These authors concluded that the pandemic created a favourable scenario for the development of rural tourism sustained by the increase of this modality in inland tourism and suggested as a possible future scenario a displacement of demand that will lead to a greater interest in this type of destination in international tourism.

It is evident, therefore, that the post-COVID situation poses a scenario of possibilities for the development of rural tourism in the province of Cáceres. Adequate planning in order to avoid making some of the mistakes of the past will be vital for this activity to develop, creating wealth, employment, and welfare for the population in which it is developed.

In short, this paper analyses the most immediate and direct impacts that the period of compulsory lockdown of the population generated among rural accommodation establishments in a markedly rural economy such as that of Cáceres. These effects are continuing, however, over time, albeit with less intensity, since at the time of writing, the pandemic has not yet been overcome, and one of the measures most widely used to curb its expansion is that of restrictions on mobility and perimeter closures (municipal, local, and even provincial and regional). These measures continue to strangle the tourism sector, which remains one of the sectors of the economy most affected by the pandemic.

The research design limits the scope of its results: as it is focused on an eminently rural province, using it as a case study, the results are limited to territories with similar characteristics. Therefore, it would be interesting as a future line of research to replicate this study in another type of destination in order to highlight which characteristics are

common to the sector and which correspond to the characteristics and tourist orientation of the destination analyzed.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.S.-R. and M.C.R.-R.; methodology, M.S.-R.; software, M.S.-R.; validation, P.G.C.; formal analysis, M.S.-R. and M.C.R.-R.; investigation, M.S.-R. and M.C.R.-R.; resources, A.M.M.G.; data curation, M.S.-R.; writing—original draft preparation, M.S.-R., M.C.R.-R., P.G.C. and A.M.M.G.; writing—review and editing, M.S.-R., M.C.R.-R., P.G.C. and A.M.M.G.; visualization, P.G.C.; supervision, A.M.M.G.; project administration P.G.C.; funding acquisition, M.S.-R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This publication is part of the research carried out within the research project "Análisis de factores críticos para el desarrollo turístico de Extremadura [(IB-18015)]", funded by the Ministry of Economy, Science and Digital Agenda of the Junta de Extremadura and by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

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