

MEDIA TOURISM IN SPAIN

The case of Soria and El Pueblo (Telecinco/Amazon Prime, 2019-2023)

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism in Spain has grown significantly in recent decades, fostering interest in innovative strategies such as film tourism, which capitalizes on the popularity of audiovisual productions to attract visitors to their filming locations. This practice, known as set-jetting and well established in the English-speaking world, is still in its infancy in Spain, where initiatives exploring its potential are beginning to emerge. The study, which is descriptive and exploratory in nature, examines media tourism strategies surrounding the television series El pueblo (Telecinco/Amazon Prime, 2019-2023). In Valdelavilla (Soria), tourist routes have been promoted through the filming locations, which preserve the series' sets intact. Through observation of this initiative and assessment of its impact on visitor numbers, the research seeks to characterize set-jetting in rural Spain and reflect on its role as a tool for territorial development and promotion.

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1. Introduction

Rural tourism in Spain has experienced significant growth over the last few decades, both in terms of the number of visitors and the proliferation of tourism services, accommodations, and dining options (Hermi Zaar, 2022). The most recent noticeable increase related to this phenomenon began in 2020, when proximity tourism was strengthened by the decline of international tourism due to the health emergency caused by COVID-19, with rural establishments being the main tourist destinations that benefited (Dot Jutglà et al., 2022). In any case, aside from this exceptional period, it is a trend that has maintained an upward trajectory, highlighting the importance of rural tourism as an activity of great social, economic, and geographical relevance both at the national and regional levels (Muñoz Semeco, 2015).

In this context, various locations worldwide have utilized the audiovisual representations made of them to promote or induce a specific route among tourists to explore the most iconic locations of films or television fictions. This relatively new tourism trend is widespread in the Anglo-Saxon realm and is encompassed under the terms *film/media tourism*. In practice, these terms are used interchangeably to describe initiatives linked to film tourism in generic terms, including guided tours of specific locations or filming sets (*set-jetting*) to theme parks located around these environments used as attractions for induced tourism (Sawińska and Smalec, 2023). Scotland is one of the most paradigm destinations in this regard, utilizing the locations of major productions as a tourist attraction, among which *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones* stand out (Garrison and Wallace, 2021).

This research aims to contextually describe and explore the practice of *set-jetting* in rural Spain, considering the growing importance of film tourism and the search for new ways to promote it by institutions. In any case, the conducted study addresses the intersection between tourism initiatives and the environment represented by cinematic and television fictions from an integrative perspective, understanding tourism as a dynamic social practice that adapts to the circumstances, trends, and needs defined by the characteristics of both travelers and the location where these initiatives are promoted (Mosedale and Voll, 2017). To achieve this, a case study analysis has been carried out. In Castile and León (Spain), the popular television fiction *El pueblo* has been used to promote guided visits to the most relevant locations of the series, filmed in the locality of Valdelavilla. Most of the sets used for filming the fiction remain intact there. Given the importance of the image presented by audiovisual representations regarding tourists' perception of destinations (Nieto Ferrando et al., 2024), as well as their potential for induced tourism, the research aims to explore the different strategies implemented in this rural environment to evaluate the characteristics of *set-jetting* in rural Spain and to determine its effectiveness and capacity to engage visitors.

1.1. Media Tourism: Contextualization and Characteristics

The term "film tourism" or "media tourism" refers to a concept promoted in the Anglo-Saxon context that encompasses a binomial of two fields: the tourism sector and the audiovisual industry (Hudson, 2011). In general terms, it refers to touristic boost that a location experiences after being targeted by promotional strategies (from public and/or private institutions) due to its high degree of iconicity or recognition among the public for its appearance as a setting in highly popular cinematic productions (Bharti, 2015). From this perspective, several factors determine the effectiveness of film-induced tourism, like the presence of the film in public spaces (its success or popularity as a social phenomenon) and the effort invested in tracing promotional initiatives before and after the film's release by institutions; in addition to intrinsic variables related to the location itself, such as accessibility and geospatial characteristics (Cardoso et al., 2017).

Empirical or theoretical studies conducted around this phenomenon fall within the recently established field of "film-induced versus destination branding image," given that tourist destinations compete based on the brand image perceived by visitors (Blanco, 2015). In this sense, audiovisual representations from cinema and television act as inducing agents among viewers and have notable transformative potential in the branding of a particular destination (Hao and Rayan, 2013). As O'Connor (2011) notes, not only films but also television series and other manifestations of popular culture, such as songs or music videos, have contributed to projecting a specific image of the city or country where the filming took place, reflecting the social and cultural practices (the lifestyles, ultimately) of the people

inhabiting the space. This is why the concept has evolved in recent years towards more integrative directions, leading to the modification of its name in favor of other terms such as “media tourism” or “screen tourism” (Buchmann et al., 2010). In any case, it is a field in constant evolution with no clear conceptual delineation within the realm of cultural tourism (Garrison and Wallace, 2021). Significantly, in 2017 the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) proposed a new, much broader and operational definition of contemporary cultural tourism, incorporating literature, film, and music as important niches in this taxonomy (Richards, 2018). More recently, the variety of approaches to its study has included research focused on analyzing sustainability policies implemented concerning film tourism (Garrison and Wallace, 2021), its use for reconstructing geopolitical imaginaries (Mostafanezhad, 2018), the use of media for applying destination branding strategies (Lundberg and Lindström, 2020), the experiential dynamics of visitors concerning the perceived authenticity of the place in relation to the image they hold of it (Chen et al., 2021), or the communities belonging to a specific fan culture that conceive visits to locations as a sort of pilgrimage (Couldry, 2007). The overall approaches mentioned above share a common element: it is impossible to separate the implications of cinematic and television fictions in tourism without first considering how they interact with viewers/tourists, which will vary based on their sociocultural context and the frequency of consumption of audiovisual fictions (Kim and Wang, 2012; Nieto Ferrando et al., 2021). Similarly, the variety of audiovisual representations included in the concept of media tourism indicates a paradigm shift in which greater attention is beginning to be paid to television series, given that their serial nature brings with it repeated exposure to locations and greater possibilities for viewer engagement with plots and characters that can induce tourist engagement (Araújo Vila & Fráiz Brea, 2013; Beeton, 2016; Nieto Ferrando et al., 2024).

1.2. Authenticity, Set-Jetting, and Fan Culture

In this sense, the present study will primarily focus on two categories of analysis: on one hand, the authenticity of the experience perceived by viewers/tourists during their visit to a specific location and the strategies implemented to maintain this fundamental element. On the other hand, it will explore the intersection between the travelers’ experience and their sense of identity or belonging within a fan community as the essence of this type of induced tourism. Despite its subjective nature, this study reaffirms the importance of authenticity as a key characteristic in defining the tourist experience and a theoretically clarifying construct in this regard (Kim and Jamal, 2007; MacCannell, 1976; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006; Selwyn, 1996; Wang, 1999). Specifically, due to its notable conceptual utility, the study will draw on the ideas of existential authenticity as articulated by Wang (1999) and refined by Reisinger and Steiner (2006). Wang (1999) advocates for this alternative interpretation of authenticity as an element that does not rely on absolute, objective criteria related to the “authentic” object. Therefore, existential authenticity does not strictly relate to establishing whether tourist objects are real or not. Rather, in the quest for an existentially authentic tourist experience, travelers/tourists seek an existential state of being activated by specific tourist activities. Thus, a significant portion of the study will focus on defining the tourism promotion strategies that engage the viewer/tourist through the activities (mostly commercial) proposed at our case study.

Studies like those by Kim and Jamal (2006) demonstrate that, ultimately, existential authenticity has an unavoidable identity component: a medieval fair transforms into a ritual experience with highly engaged tourists, within a socially constructed alternative reality where, above all, the search for the “authentic self” and human relationships takes place. In this regard, Belhassen et al. (2008) clarify that the collective understanding of the environment (the sites/objects visited) is part of existential authenticity (the experience of the “self” in the location), with both elements together constituting the complex notion of authenticity. One of the most paradigmatic case studies that illustrates the practical application of this notion of authenticity is the work by Buchmann et al. (2010) regarding *The Lord of the Rings* (Peter Jackson, 2001-2003) and the various locations in New Zealand used for filming. The research concludes that the value of this tourist experience does not solely stem from the objects and landscapes but, above all, from the moments of interaction (bodily) with the place and with other visitors, which contribute to the place’s meaning. There is nothing “real” except what tourists “believe” in a place where reality and film manifestation merge: “For me, entering those fields is magical because I keep turning around looking for Gandalf, Frodo, or someone. And at the same time, I can crouch down and touch the grass” (Buchmann et al., 2010, p. 242).

The idea of a collective experience of the place that runs through the entire preceding argument connects directly with the second category of analysis: the sense of belonging and identity surrounding a fan community. The social (and cultural) practice of set-jetting (a concept derived from film tourism) is fundamental to link the tourist experience and fan culture. It is a term that was first coined by journalist Gretchen Kelly in 2008 to describe the growing trend among tourists to choose travel destinations based on those used as film locations, citing the importance of environmental details in the Jason Bourne saga. Over time, the concept has been adopted by the field of experiential marketing within the tourism sector, and has been redefined as the commercial activity of organizing events and trips that involve visiting the locations (with or without the sets) that have been used to shoot films and television series (Smalec, 2019). Sawińska and Smalec (2023) position this term as a relatively novel but effective tourism trend as an alternative to traditional tools for promoting an area (especially in local contexts).

In practical terms, this approach is based on the realization that watching series and films influences travelers' destination choices. To channel this motivation into successful tourist experiences, it is necessary not only to locate and contextualize the place where an audiovisual fiction was filmed but also to "intervene" in it or arrange it in various ways so that the viewer/tourist feels addressed and comes to visit. Therefore, experimentation and the proliferation of unconventional initiatives through varied activities that exceed mere passive tourist experiences are fundamental for the contemporary viewer (Sawińska and Smalec, 2023, p. 520). A recent report reveals that in the UK, 46% of travelers consider visiting a destination after seeing it in a film or television fiction through streaming platforms (Marshall, 2023).

These ideas are related with the concept of existential authenticity previously discussed, but it is essential to integrate a second element to analyze the phenomenon in all its complexity: if the effectiveness of set-jetting strategies is closely linked to a collective experience or understanding of the environment (the objects or places visited), there are a series of shared values by a community that can be related to the concept of fan culture. Daniel Aranda (2013) highlights that, while fans have traditionally been a poorly legitimized object of study due to their association with "vulgar" culture lacking "taste" (in the terms referred to by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu), the relationship of fan communities with their "worshiped" objects (in this case, tourist ones) should be approached, not from a perspective of decay and vulgarization, but as an exchange of discourses where fans act as meaning-producing agents within a shared symbolic space (Fiske, 1992; Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2006).

The concept of community from Silverstone (2004), as cited by Aranda, is particularly revealing in this regard for defining fan communities: "We build ideas about what we belong to, and we define and understand it in the images we have of it or in those offered to us" (Silverstone, 2004, p. 24). Communities are distinguished not by their falseness or authenticity but by the style in which they are imagined (Anderson, 1983). Existential authenticity inevitably includes that shared symbolic space among fans: the practice of set-jetting and the significant emotional drive of locating the environment by the viewer/traveler stems from a specific collective understanding of the tourist object (Buchmann et al., 2010). These shared values arise from the negotiated vision of the place offered in the audiovisual representations that forms a community, such that media are used by different social groups "to control and construct the meaning of their activities and their communities" (Aranda, 2013, p. 25). If we then consider the interpretative communities in the terms outlined by Fish (2001), we must value, as intended in this study, the cultural experience of the audience, understanding television (in this case, television fiction) as a social object where attention must be paid to the dimension of what it is and why it is important for the audience: "attending to the (subjective) meaning given by agents in their relationships with television to, from it, reconstruct the (objective) sense" (Callejo Gallego, 1995, p. 4). Ultimately, at this intersection between set-jetting and fan culture, it is all about observing the shared values of communities around destinations as part of the experience of authenticity, as well as exploring how these have been channeled through the various initiatives and activities proposed by tourism services.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this study is to, descriptively and exploratorily, analyze the tourism trend of set-jetting in rural Spain, using the case study of the television fiction *El pueblo* (Telecinco/Amazon Prime, 2019-2023). This general objective is broken down into two specific objectives:

OE1. Explore the characteristics of the designed tourist experiences in relation to the notions of authenticity and existential authenticity.

OE2. Connect set-jetting and the capacity of media tourism to engage with the identity feelings of fan communities.

The methodological design starts with the selection of the case study. The exploration of the phenomenon of set-jetting in Spain is limited to the rural context, given that this type of tourism has experienced the most significant growth in recent years nationally, through the implementation of a wide variety of initiatives by the tourism sector to attract travelers (Dot Jutglà et al., 2022; Hermi Zaar, 2022; Muñoz Semeco, 2015). Therefore, it is a fertile ground for analyzing a relatively emerging trend. Additionally, the selection of a television fiction such as *El pueblo* (Telecinco/Amazon Prime, 2019-2023) has been considered for several reasons: first, after a preliminary analysis of the tourist routes and activities linked to media tourism promoted across the national territory, the initiative related to this television series is unique in Spain, having maintained a significant part of the original sets used for filming, a fact has resonated greatly with visitors. Furthermore, the components of seriality and repeated exposure to the tourist objects inherent in a television fiction, as well as the consideration of television as a social object through which a shared symbolic space is created by fan communities, make it an ideal audiovisual manifestation to connect with the social and cultural practice of set-jetting (Callejo Gallego, 1995; Nieto Ferrando et al., 2024).

To achieve the proposed objectives, three qualitative methodological procedures have been articulated, having proven effective in previous research to explore such phenomena (Bolan et al., 2011; Garrison and Wallace, 2021; Sawińska and Smalec, 2023). First, a detailed bibliographic and press review has been conducted to gather information on the characteristics of the tourist initiatives developed regarding the series in the municipality of Valdelavilla. Understanding tourism as a social practice, this analysis has been complemented by a participatory observation process, referencing the model developed by Richards and Ruíz Lanuza (2017) regarding the study of tourist experiences at festivals and events. In this case, the observational dynamic involved visiting and exploring the activities implemented in the Soria locality, which allowed for contextualization and a deeper understanding of the data obtained in the initial documentation phase. The visit was also an opportunity to conduct an in-depth interview with the individuals responsible for the tourist activities.

3. Analysis of Results

3.1. Contextualization of the Case Study

Before analyzing the experience of set-jetting, it is essential to briefly contextualize the television fiction being studied. *El pueblo* ("The Village") is a comedy produced by Telecinco and Prime Video, created by Alberto Caballero, Julián Sastre, and Nando Abad. It narrates the story of a group of people fleeing the city to live in Peñafría, a fictitious village supposedly abandoned in the heart of Soria, in the midst of the "La España Vacía" ("Empty Spain"). The central conflict arises when they discover that the village is inhabited by a few residents. The comedy is fundamentally based on the cultural clashes between urban and rural customs.

Most episodes are directed by Laura and Alberto Caballero, along with Roberto Monge. The Caballero siblings form a creative tandem that has brought to life some of the most popular comedies on Spanish television over the last 20 years (Palacio, 2024), such as *Aquí no hay quien viva* (Antena 3, 2003-2006) or *La que se avecina* (Telecinco, 2007-). Therefore, it is considered that the television fictions produced by the Caballero brothers have a notable presence in the social space and, consequently, a capacity to engage the audience that facilitates the formulation of set-jetting strategies. This creative tandem has specialized on creating fictions characterized by ensemble casts that convey coexistence and Spanish stereotypes as common conceptual threads. *Aquí no hay quien viva* and its sequel *La que se avecina* are particularly well-known and have a large community of followers. As Palacio (2024) states, "they are the most useful series for understanding Spain" (p. 144).

However, *El pueblo* was produced within a very different television context compared to its predecessors. This fiction is the result of a collaboration between Telecinco and Amazon Prime Video, produced at a time of transition in the television model, where OTT platforms and traditional television compete and, at the same time, share content (Albornoz et al., 2024; Fernández Herruzo and Pedrero

Esteban, 2023). The series premiered in 2019 exclusively on Prime Video, eight months before its airing on linear television. This complicates any assessment of its audiences, although it is undeniable that *El pueblo* has not achieved the same level of popularity as its predecessors. Over its four seasons, the series averaged a 10.4% share of the audience according to available data from Barlovento Comunicación, in contrast to the 33.8% achieved by *Aquí no hay quien viva*. Although the television contexts are very different, it is difficult to imagine that the sets of *Aquí no hay quien viva* would not be successful if they were part of a tourist route (“The building of *Aquí no hay quien viva* exists... and it’s in Madrid”, 2021). Therefore, the existence of a set-jetting initiative surrounding a series like *El pueblo* is of great interest, as it tests the persistence of a series in the collective imagination in a context of audience fragmentation.

3.2. Valdelavilla: Historical Context and Tourism Management

The series was filmed in Valdelavilla, a district of San Pedro Manrique, located in the Tierras Altas region of Soria. The idea to shoot in this location came from Roberto Monge, one of the directors, who is originally from Soria (“Director Roberto Monge Receives the 2022 Monreal Award,” 2022). As will be analyzed later, filming in this village offered several advantages over shooting in a studio or another location closer to Madrid, where the production company is based.

To briefly contextualize the history of the locality, it is relevant to review the narratives presented on the tourism promotion website regarding the history of Valdelavilla (2024). Like many other villages in Spain, Valdelavilla suffered rural depopulation in the 1950s, culminating in the total abandonment of the village in 1968. Since then, it has remained uninhabited. The ownership of the houses and land, with one exception detailed later, belongs to Caja Rural de Soria, a banking entity that is part of the Spanish Association of Rural Savings Banks. It was not until 1998 that, after months of rehabilitation, Caja Rural inaugurated a “Rural Tourist Complex” consisting of twelve rental houses, a meeting room, a café, and a restaurant. In 2001, the district transformed into a large English school under the “Vaughantown” project, an immersive language experience where a group of students lived for several weeks with native English speakers. Another strategy employed to boost its promotion is to offer the destination for weddings, by providing accommodation for family and guests, as well as the entire village as a picturesque lodging option. It is worth noting that this tourism promotion website is owned by Caja Rural, which also owns Valdelavilla, indicating that it is not a public initiative in any case.

The electronic resources available on the website indicate that 2018 is a significant year: the television fiction created by the production company Contubernio began filming in various locations in Valdelavilla, with rehabilitated houses that needed to be aged and decorated specifically as if it were “a trip to the past” for the characters. The crucial issue revealed by the documentation is that the series’ creators found in this district a perfect filming set amidst the so-called Tierras Altas. For them, the combination of natural environments offered and the silence surrounding the locality reaffirms its suitability as a filming studio outside the usual professional routines in traditional studios located in industrial warehouses on the outskirts of Madrid. Aside from the different corporate policies and programming strategies followed by Mediaset, there is no doubt that *El pueblo* has had a significant impact (both in traditional broadcasting and streaming) in Spanish households (Majdalani, 2024). Its place in the social space has thus served as a catalyst for its followers who do not want to miss “the opportunity to get to know the authentic and true” village (Valdelavilla, 2024).

The tourism information in the Valdelavilla directory reveals several interesting aspects. The first concerns the issue of authenticity. The need to “age” the houses reflects that, in many ways, Valdelavilla is today a simulacrum of what a Sorian village once was. The only remnants of its past are the dry-stone structure of the houses (Figure 1), as their interiors have been rehabilitated and renovated. On the other hand, this promotional text highlights one of the main attractions of the location in terms of audiovisual production: as an abandoned village, Valdelavilla offers an environment that seems more “authentic,” while also allowing for the rental of the location and housing the production team.

Figure 1. Example of Valdelavilla's architecture.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

However, this has generated several conflicts of interest, which have been highlighted in in-depth interviews conducted with the project leaders. As mentioned, Valdelavilla is currently owned by a banking entity that benefits from renting out the village, whether as a wedding venue or as a Rural Tourist Complex. Another source of income for Caja Rural has been the rental of the location for filming, which involves closing the village to potential rural tourists. Although the series concluded in 2023, many of the houses remain closed to preserve some of the sets. This raises the unanswered question of how these sets are still able to remain in the location today.

3.3. Set-Jetting in Valdelavilla: Discovering Peñafría

The initiative to offer a tourism experience centered around the series arises from "a working group formed by Caja Rural, Estudio Ayllón, Soria Consultores, Markocinando, the Tierras Altas Community, the San Pedro Tourism Office, and the Association of Former Inhabitants of Valdelavilla" (Llorente Yoldi, 2022b), in collaboration with Contubernio SL, the series' production company. This experience is primarily organized through a guided tour of the municipality of Valdelavilla and the various sets located within the houses, managed by the tourist company Sendas Vivas.

According to testimony provided by the tour guide, the idea of maintaining the sets also arose as a solution for the production company. Between seasons, Valdelavilla continued to operate as a rural tourist complex, which required dismantling the sets and remounting them a few months later. Leaving the sets intact and offering the opportunity to showcase them as part of a rural tourism experience benefited both the production company, as it avoided dismantling, and the banking entity that owns the village, by adding more attractions for visitors.

While visiting Valdelavilla is free, the only way to see the sets is through a guided tour, which costs €8 and is offered every weekend, from Friday to Sunday, with three time slots available (10:30, 12:00, and 16:00). The participant observation took place during the 12:00 slot on a summer Saturday, considering that it is one of the peak tourist influx periods. The following will address the elements of the visit deemed most relevant to the study's objectives.

3.4. Guided tour in Valdelavilla

The accessibility of the location is quite complex due to its geographical setting, as it is situated in the middle of a valley and requires descending a narrow, winding two-way road. Upon arriving at a small parking lot, visitors are greeted by a map titled "Visit the village of the series." The map indicates which character from the fiction belongs to each house/set. The visit begins at the Valdelavilla tourist office, where visitors are given a cap featuring the logos of Peñafría (the fictional village) and Valdelavilla. There is also the option to purchase a "queso protocolario" ("protocol cheese"), a reference to the cheese that the inhabitants of the series gift to each visitor who arrives in the village (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The map that greets visitors (on the left) and the “Protocol Cheese” (on the right).



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The visit, which lasts approximately one and a half hour, consists of a tour of Valdellavilla, showcasing some of the sets that remain intact inside the houses. The tour begins with a brief historical contextualization of the village, using the pretext of the television fiction, and clarifies that many of the houses are not accessible during the visit, as they are used for rural tourism rentals. A brief contextualization with curiosities about the filming of the series is also provided, engaging the tourist/viewer. Since the buildings in Valdellavilla are two stories tall, it was possible to set up a set on the ground floor and use the upper floor to accommodate the production team and actors during filming (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Example of the sets that can be visited. None of the objects are original to the house; everything is staged.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

A brief walk around the village does not reveal many traces of the production, except for a photograph of Silvia Casanova portraying Doña Emilia and “shushing,” as her character does in the series. There is also a well that, although it appears authentic, is the only set built outdoors (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Example of the exteriors of Valdelavilla.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

At the entrance of each house, a small monitor plays a video about two minutes long (Figure 5). These videos consist of an introduction to the house made by the series' actors, who portray their own characters and speak directly to the viewer in another attempt at direct engagement. Additionally, within the framework of their eccentric performances, the actors' lines sketch out their most recognizable characteristics to the audience (again, highlighting the combination of collective understanding and authenticity). After the introduction, a brief montage shows images of the sets as they appear in the fiction. For example, here is the script from the introductory video to the house of Arsacio and María, played by Vicente Gil and Empar Ferrer:

Figure 5. In the videos introducing each house, the characters directly engage with the viewer.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

María: Upload photos to... Facebook; all those modern things you know... Since it looks so nice, maybe some magazine...

Arsacio: If you break anything, I'll give you a slap that you won't forget.

María: Oh Arsacio, really. They've come to see the village; you can't act like that. What I was saying: I hope you like it a lot and that you come back many times. And let all your friends know how beautiful our village is. And you know: we're here to welcome you.

Arsacio: So when do we eat? (Valdevilla, 2024)

After watching the video, the tour guide offers a detailed explanation of each set, sharing several anecdotes from the filming. Then, a few minutes are reserved for visitors to take photographs of the set. These filming experiences are particularly interesting in relation to set-jetting, as they illustrate the difficulties of filming in such "authentic" and small spaces (far from the comforts of a studio), like in the

House of “El Ovejas” (Figure 6). It is showcased that to film in that space, only one camera angle was possible, which is the only one shown in the series.

Figure 6. The small space where the House of “Ovejas” was located.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Furthermore, the constructed nature of the staging is emphasized, without any historical fidelity. One example is that the houses/sets are located on the ground floors of the buildings, which were originally stables (Figure 7). According to the responsible guide, the aim of the art direction was not to recreate the old houses of Valdelavilla, but to adapt each stable to the style of the characters, leaving the upper floors free for the creative team to stay. Some filming marks are also shown, such as stickers on the floor indicating the positions of the actors or objects.

Figure 7. The low ceilings seen above the sets remind us that they were formerly stables.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

However, the sets serve as a pretext to narrate the history of Valdelavilla. In the visit to the set of the Town Hall (Figure 8) of the series, it is explained that the building where it is located was the last to be built, intended to be a school. Today, it is the only space in the village that belongs to an association of former residents of Valdelavilla, who, although no longer living there, return once a year to celebrate the patronal festivities. In a corner, a chalkboard is preserved as a homage to the building's original purpose.

Figure 8. The town hall was the former school of the village. The portrait of Queen Letizia is a direct reference to a plot in the series.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Another relevant aspect is the information provided about the impact of the filming on the area. Although the crew of the series resided in Valdelavilla during the months of production, the actors often visited San Pedro Manrique, the nearest town. The guide, who is from there, shares some anecdotes, such as having had the opportunity to go out partying with the famous actor Carlos Areces.

The visit concludes with a stop at a restaurant offering typical dishes from the area, along with the opportunity to take photos with images of the characters from the series (Figure 9).

Figure 9. The restaurant of Valdelavilla.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The set-jetting experience offered by Valdelavilla is, as previously mentioned, unique in the Spanish national context. The main discussion points revolve around the application of notions of existential authenticity and the collective experience of fan communities or followers of the series. First, it has been demonstrated that the sets are the main attraction of the visit, and all narratives are articulated through them. Among the findings, it is important to highlight that Valdelavilla leverages the very conflict of the series to create its own destination brand (Blanco, 2015; Hao and Rayan, 2013). When tourists/viewers visit the village, just as when they watch the series, they witness a "simulation" of the "empty Spain," in the terms mentioned by Buchmann et al. (2010) regarding the locations in New Zealand in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*. Valdelavilla offers a space with a dual dimension, functioning simultaneously as an audiovisual tourism and rural experience. Many of the visitors come from large urban areas, and it is presumed, given their interest in the series, that the contrast between urban and rural environments has a significant capacity to engage them. Therefore, it can be elucidated that one of the fundamental axes of existential authenticity, as defined by Wang (1999), that activates the tourist/viewer beyond the "authentic" tourist object is the presence of discourses that confront them with the city.

Similarly, introductory videos about the houses/sets function as authentic paratexts that act as a bridge between what the community of viewers negotiates in the shared symbolic space generated from watching the series and what they are seeing in reality during the visit. This connection is one of the cornerstones of the configuration of tourism strategies, as it enables fans to interact (physically) with the place, imagine and exchange comments with other visitors (belonging to a community with a collective understanding of the place), which contributes to, but also constantly re-signifies, the "authentic" experience in existential terms. Tourists are also able to revel in this clash through the many anecdotes about what it was like to shoot the series on those sets. In short, the planning of the short videos takes into account the emotion that the characters arouse in viewers, connecting with the fan experience itself and with the feelings of attachment that characterize television series. The fact that tourists are particularly interested in the house of the character "El Ovejas," as indicated by the company Sendas Vivas, reflects how fan emotions play a crucial role in tourist attraction (Llorente Yoldi, 2022b). The emotional bond between the characters and visitors strengthens the experiential component of set-jetting, transforming what could be a traditional visit into, according to Couldry (2007), a kind of

emotional pilgrimage. It is also important to highlight how the filming of this series serves as a pretext to promote the rest of the tourist offer in the area, in line with the trend of offering diversified tourist experiences. From the opportunity to stay in the village or buy a traditional cheese (produced locally), to following some of the film or ethnographic routes offered by the Valdelavilla promotional website.

As a final appendix, a brief comment is proposed regarding the effectiveness of the proposal in terms of tourist influx. While data on the number of visits are not public, a review of local press reports has allowed for the acquisition of some interesting data. Initially, after the opening of the visit to the sets in 2020, the village received an average of 150 people every weekend (Muñoz, 2020). In 2022, an article from *Diario de Valladolid* stated that the series functions as an "economic engine of the province" and that during weekends the village receives about 600 people a day (Llorente Yoldi, 2022a), a notable growth that reflects the enormous potential that set-jetting has to revitalize rural areas. The only global data provided by the press is that of 9,000 visitors from November to April 2022. However, there is a small nuance that deserves mention. Of those 9,000 people, only 1,200 took the guided tour of the sets (Llorente Yoldi, 2022a). In an interview with the tourist staff of Valdelavilla, they stated that while the filming of the series has led to a surge of visitors to the village, many do not choose the guided tour due to ignorance, suggesting that they might need to work on communicating the experience. In any case, the conclusion drawn from the analysis of this data is positive and, in a way, demonstrates the potential of set-jetting to highlight certain environments of rural Spain.

Throughout this case analysis, an attempt has been made to study the audiovisual tourism proposal of Valdelavilla, analyzing the strategies used through the promotion and use of sets to activate the tourist both in terms of existential authenticity and from the perspective of the identity sentiment derived from belonging to a community of interpretive fans or followers. The circumstances that have allowed such an experience to take place in the Spanish national context have also been precisely established. Its remarkable success as a set-jetting destination illustrates the potential that audiovisual tourism offers to revitalize rural areas. One of the future lines of research that will complement the conducted study will consist of determining the sustainability of these proposals: one of the challenges will be to ensure that this phenomenon maintains a balance between tourist growth and the preservation of the authenticity that attracts visitors so much (regarding audiovisual tourism and sustainability, see Garrison and Wallace, 2021). The research results affirm that Valdelavilla and its commercial tourist services can reinvent themselves based on their audiovisual representations but face the challenge of continuing to diversify their offerings and improving their communication to ensure a steady flow of tourists in the medium term. In any case, this initiative is an example of how the conjunction of audiovisual fiction, rurality, and tourist experiences can provide not only a temporary tourist attraction but also a sustainable avenue for the economic and cultural regeneration of the "empty Spain."

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