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Tourism sustainability in emptied Spain

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Introduction

The importance of tourism in Spain has grown with non-stop since the mid-twentieth century, when the development of post-war Europe and the openness of Franco's dictatorship offered the perfect combination for the arriving of more tourists each year at Spanish coasts. First advances were made by public impulse plus private initiative in Marbella, Benidorm, Mallorca and the Canary Islands. The economic benefit obtained by tourism in these areas was so important, that in the decades that followed, the entire national territory promoted its transformation into a tourist destination, including the rural regions that were far from urban systems. The impulse of the public administrations to rural tourism and tourism of nature was reflected in subsidies to private initiatives, the elaboration of planning instruments and the creation of new tourist infrastructures in sparsely populated areas, that formed the base for a further growth and diversification of the Spanish tourism model. As a result, in January 2001 the National Institute of Statistics (INE) registered 4,958 rural tourism establishments, irregular distributed throughout the territory, with a higher concentration of them-one of every three establishments- located in Asturias, Huesca, Navarra and Tenerife. In January 2022, according to the data published by the INE, the total number of accommodations was tripled, 14,337 establishments, where Malaga, Asturias, Ávila and Navarra concentrated the 25% of the offer. It is significant that, two of the provinces with the largest number of rural establishments in 2001 an 2022 are part of what it is known as the emptied Spain - Huesca and Ávila-, turned into destinations of inland tourism for the urban markets of near Zaragoza and Madrid. Together with these two provinces, there are two communities, that have promoted for decades this type of tourism (Asturias and Navarra) and there are also two provinces of sun and beach tourism, that have spread their accommodation infrastructures inland (Tenerife and Malaga).

For the so rural Spanish environments, this process of becoming a tourist destination has been an objective encouraged by all public administrations: municipalities, provincial councils, autonomous communities and, above all, Local Action Groups. In some regions, the structural transformation of the territory has been well

planned and has generated positive socioeconomic dynamics that are maintained over time, as in the examples of Taramundi in Asturias (Córdoba, 2004) or the Alpujarras of Granada (Entrena, 2006). However, in other cases the objective of transformation has remained only as a political will with few consequences on the territory, where the creation of tourist infrastructures supported by public funds have been abandoned shortly after. In this sense, tourism sustainability should be related to the reduction of possible impacts in areas of great demand, but also to the consideration of clear justification to avoid oversized supply in certain territories.

This dilemma raised in many regions of emptied Spain where, thanks to different public subsidies, the proliferation of tourist infrastructures have been generated without any prior or potential demand that could justify it. Thus, interpretive centres, auditoriums, museums, exhibition halls, hotels, spas, restaurants and other varied tourist facilities, which have been built or placed in buildings rehabilitated for this purpose, run into serious difficulties shortly after opening due to a lack of demand (González and Macías, 2014; Arcila and López, 2015; Navarro et al, 2016). Territorial resilience, the capacity to adapt and overcome a geographical space in the face of negative situations, should be promoted in these places of the emptied Spain, continuing to generate productive landscapes, instead of just contemplative ones to be consumed by urban tourists. Tourism can be an engine of development in certain areas close to demand markets and with privileged territorial resources, but not in all rural areas by definition or general rule.

This chapter aims to analyse the sustainability of rural and nature tourism in those Spanish territories that have suffered the most from depopulation, contrasting generic rural accommodation projects with the so-called return tourism, the temporary or definitive return of former inhabitants or families from these places during their leisure time.

The analysis of rural tourism

The vision of the European rural world changed since 1988, when the document of the European Commission "The future of rural society" explained the main disadvantages of these territories and the measures that should be implemented to improve the quality of life of their inhabitants. In this document, which would guide rural development policies throughout Europe, it was stated: "Among the services to be created in rural areas, rural tourism occupies a very special place and, a priori, the prospects seem very favourable" (European Commission, 1988, 11). From then on, rural development programmes in Europe were articulated through the LEADER Community initiative, later replicated in Spain with the PRODER Programme and other aid instruments of the autonomous communities, such as AGADER in Galicia. In this way, dozens of associated territories in rural areas were able to obtain aid to promote a type of development in which tourism was a fundamental element. In 1991, 52 Local Action Groups promoted development actions in different territories of Spain, out of a total of 1,288 municipalities. Twenty years later, there were 264 Local Action Groups established in Spain, covering more than

7,000 municipalities (Sancho Comíns, 2011). Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 21st century, tourism was no longer the star measure of the Local Action Groups, and the actions have been focused more on the valorisation of agricultural production, the development of new companies and the improvement of the quality of rural life. Nowadays, with regard to the community funding period 2021-2027, there are 241 registered Local Action Groups, that follow the guidelines set by each autonomous community in its own Rural Development Programme (RDP). A clear result of rural development policy is the great increase in rural accommodation during the first few years (Figure 1), much of which was co-financed with European funds (Hortelano, 2015).

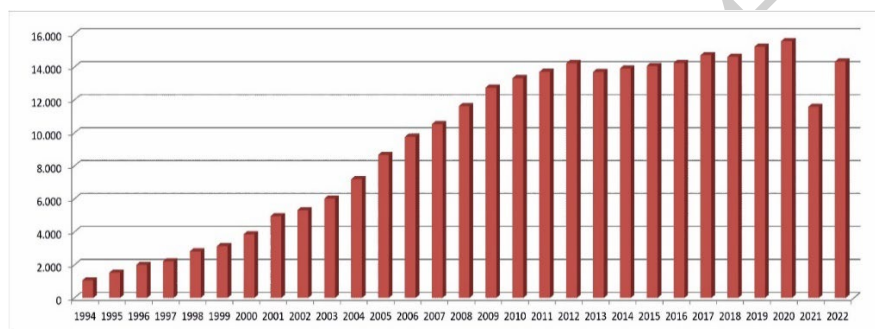


Fig. 1. Rural tourism establishments opened in January of each year in Spain (1994-2022). Source: Ine.es

Tourism has been evaluated in different investigations as an engine of rural development and a key line in public aid programs in these territories. Blanco and Benayas (1994) analysed the first experiences of tourism promotion of LEADER I, concluding that initiatives in this area were fundamental, both for the number of projects and for the investment made, although they criticized the lack of studies on the real demand for these activities and the lack of tourism planning. This last element, the lack of planning, is one of the biggest conditions for the future sustainability of this type of tourism according to Pulido and Cárdenas (2011). Ivars (2000) affirms that the supply of rural tourism grew in Spain as an unquestionable reality, although it highlights other realities in gestation, harsh realities and even fictions, such as considering that tourism is the key to rural development. A similar critical sense can be observed in the work of Canoves, Villarino and Herrera (2006), in which they affirm that rural tourism is not the solution to the problems of the Spanish rural environment, questioning the sustainability of many of the developed tourism initiatives. Vázquez and Martín (2011) also focus on the sustainability problems of Spanish rural tourism, pointing to the absence of planning, the structural characteristics of the sector, the low qualification, the undifferentiated offer, and the poor commercialization as the main elements to improve. For their part, Maroto and Pintos (2020), question whether rural tourism has been able to stop the processes of

depopulation in southern Spain, analysing the demographic evolution of rural Andalusian municipalities with more accommodation. These authors conclude that tourism alone is not capable of reversing the recessionary trends of rural territories, and that other productive economic processes are needed to achieve this objective (Maroto and Pintos, 2020). There are more analyses of specific cases, in which the development generated by tourism in other rural territories is studied, such as Castile and León, Catalonia, Extremadura, Aragon, Galicia or Murcia (Bachiller, 1994; Maya, 1999; Andrés, 2000; Aparicio, 2004; Rico 2005, Nieto y Cárdenas, 2005; Canoves et al, 2014; Millán et al, 2014; Jurado y Pazos, 2016; Font, Sánchez y Coma, 2018). In the latest research cited, the case of Teruel is analysed, putting in relation the main public investments and the results in recent years. The authors wonder if tourism is the miracle sector that will manage to curb the negative dynamics of the province of Teruel and promote the development of this territory, reaching the conclusion that, although the data do not show a clear growth, the important investments made have allowed to mitigate the situation of socioeconomic crisis (Font, Sánchez and Coma, 2018). The most complete study on the development of tourism generated through rural development programs in a specific territory is the doctoral thesis of Professor Luis Alfonso Hortelano (2015), entitled "Rural development and tourism in Castile and León: successes and failures", highlighting from the title itself the ambivalence of this process. In the conclusions, Professor Hortelano points out that rural tourism has not managed to stop the demographic bleeding in the most of the territories benefit from European aid (Hortelano, 2015, 333).

On the other hand, most of the researchers who focus their studies on rural/local development do recognize the importance of community initiatives in the mobilization of private investments in these territories, in the ability to transfer innovation and entrepreneurship processes and in the fact of placing the problems of less inhabited and dynamic spaces on the political agenda (Febles et al, 2005; Esparcia et al, 2009). There is talk about a new rurality, in which the traditional functions of the countryside based on food production change towards the consideration of these territories as places where somebody can develop a vital project with higher quality than urban spaces and where improvements in communication infrastructures, physical and virtual, allow the development of innovative and productive projects (Trigueros et al, 2018). In this vision of the new rurality as a modern and innovative space of production and services, in which women have a fundamental role (Baylina, 2019), tourism is just an activity within a wide range of socioeconomic and environmental development possibilities.

Theoretical framework

The notion of sustainable development spread from the 1987 United Nations paper "Our Common Future", also known as the Brundtland Report due to the surname of the former Norwegian Prime Minister who chaired then the World Commission on Environment and Development (General Assembly, 1987). Later, at the meeting of this organization held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, this type of development not

focused on the economic, in contrast to the capitalist model, was extended by adding the social and environmental pillars and defining it as the ideal situation in which the needs of the present generation can be fulfilled without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The OECD published in 2006 the study "The New Rural Paradigm", in which it was laid the foundations of what has been defined as "new rurality" (OECD, 2006). According to this vision, the loss of employment in the traditional primary agricultural and livestock sector had generated in followed decades a deep crisis in the rural area of developed countries, which had been tried to alleviate with sectoral policies of agricultural subsidies, oriented from top to bottom, which had not yielded results, since the municipalities continued to lose population. The orientation that the OECD advised to give to rural policies was based on the generation of new economic engines, through investments and not subsidies, in which the territorial dimension (place-based policy) should be imposed on sectorial approaches and in which multilevel governance would have greater recognition. The five pillars that defended this new normal rural were: the local scale, diversity, the environment, cooperation and innovation.

The traditional functionality of the rural environment for producing food for the urban population, was transformed as countries were advancing in their development and the globalization of the economy were spreading, until a time when the lack of function became in abandonment. The rural exodus was not only the march of the youngest and potentially innovative population to the cities which benefited from this continuous contribution of new sap to be increasingly dynamic and transgressive, it was also the condemnation to a deferred immobility of a territory emptied of meaning, where remained people were getting older to finally disappear.

The only way to reverse this situation would be to bet on new functions for the rural environment, which could fix population and even attract new settlers. With the paradigm of the new rurality, the countryside has now come to be seen as a territory where anyone can put into practice the principles of sustainability, the "slow" movement or local development. A quiet territory, refuge from the current accelerated way of life, which offers better conditions for a postmodern society critical of the virtues and risks of living in the city.

By valuing the sustainability of rural tourism in the Spanish sparsely populated territories we try to question whether the efforts invested in the creation and promotion of tourism resources help to sustain the desired balance between economic growth, social development and environmental protection, which guarantee also the continuity of future generations, or is the new rurality, understood as the generalized development of services and the recovery of the fields' productivity, the key for the future of these territories.

In the current socio-economic context of permanent mutation sustainability is more fragile than ever. It must be associated with the flexibility and adaptability that is provided by being resilient. Actions must be directed towards the search for sustainable development as a constant improvement of society through the promotion of territorial resilience in a context of risks and constant unforeseeable changes.

This statement, contemplated in the specific area to which this research refers, entails rethinking general maxims and theoretical models applied indiscriminately to any territory. We have to seek the differentiation and multiplicity of options of the rural spaces furthest from the hierarchical urban system, avoiding the pretension of returning to their original state and being adapted to the new and changing circumstances that define our present days.

Analysis of data on tourism in rural Spain

Rural tourism has as a precedent in Spain, the public program Holidays in Farmhouses (*Vacaciones en Casas de Labranza*), initiated during the Franco dictatorship, in 1967, through an agreement between the General Directorate of Tourism Promotion and the General Directorate of Agricultural Training. This proposal offered the possibility for families of vacationers who lived in the cities to spend several days in the countryside. In that first year, a total of 1,152 tourist places were offered throughout Spain in 384 farmers' homes in 35 towns in two different provinces (Carazo, 1982). In 1977, when political changes in Spain began to reduce institutional support for this Program, the places offered were 34,693, distributed in 448 locations in 41 provinces with 9,410 rural houses (Olmedo and Carmona, 1997) (Figure 2). Let us bear in mind that, in 1994, when the development of rural tourism promoted by the Local Action Groups began, the number of establishments was 1,074. and that the more than 9,400 rural tourism accommodations will not be reached until 2006.

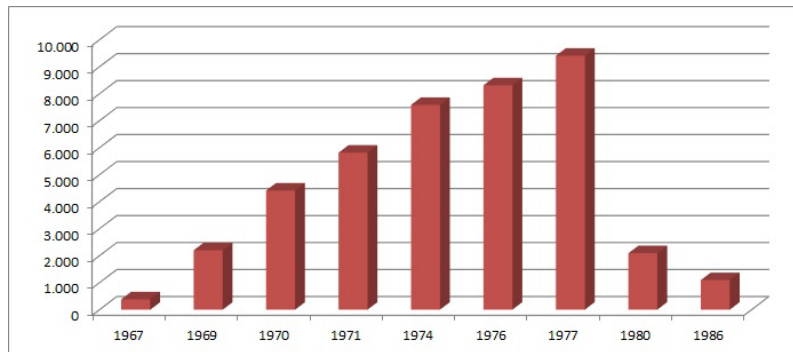


Fig. 2. Farmhouses offered in the program guides. Sources: Carazo 1982; Olmedo and Carmona, 1997.

Does this mean that rural tourism was already a thriving and developed tourism modality in 1977 Spain? Obviously not. The reality is that in the Program "Holidays in Farmhouses", along with incipient examples of rural tourism in regions such as Las Alpujarras of Granada, the Jerte Valley in Cáceres or the Sierra de Gredos in Ávila, generic announcements made by the municipalities were included, with the approval of the provincial governments, which were unreal, as in the guides of 1970 and 1971, in which the province of Castellón appears with twice the offer of the

second in the list (Cáceres), standing out among the locations Viver (2,056 inhabitants in 1970) that offered 500 farmhouses or Eslida with an offer of 300 houses (875 inhabitants in 1970) (Olmedo y Carmona, 1997). On the other hand, the Agricultural Extension Services, as now the Local Action Groups, promoted the diversification of the income of the rural population with institutional aid. With the Program, a series of aids were channelled, first subsidies and then interest-free loans, which the owners of the houses had to use to improve their houses, such as putting a bathroom (Canoves et al, 2005), in order to complement agricultural income with tourism. The contract with the State Administration obliged the owners to offer the house in the guide a minimum of three years or until the loan was extinguished, which could have a maximum duration of 10 years. Once the obligation to offer the house was finished, if the business was not profitable, the tourist activity was closed without further contemplation.

The analysis of the tourist guides of farmhouses carried out by Olmedo and Carmona (1997) allows us to analyse the evolution of this accommodation model, whose most important indicators appear in Table 1. Observing this evolution we can appreciate the irregularities manifested in these guides. For example, between 1974 and 1977 only four more locations were added to the catalogue, from 444 to 448, and yet this means the increase of almost 2,000 farmhouses, from 7,588 to 9,410, as a result of the massive offers made by some mayors. The ratio of places/establishment is also revealing. In the first years, a room of each Farmhouse was offered to tourism, so the number of places were the 3 people who could occupy that room. In 1980, when the vast majority of homes that had already paid the instalments of their loans were canceled and the generic offers of the municipalities disappeared, the ratio amounted to 4.6 and it was in the guide of 1985-86, when the number of establishments was closer to a professionalized offer and distributed throughout the country. Despite being the last guide published by the Program and having only 1,096 houses, it is in this guide when a greater number of locations are registered, 458, and when the ratio of places per establishment is higher, 8.1.

Guide	Establishments	Locations	Places	Places/establishment
1967	384	35	1.152	3
1969	2.202	131	7.380	3,3
1971	5.818	319	18.763	3,2
1974	7.588	444	28.473	3,7
1977	9.410	448	34.693	3,7
1980	2.093	398	9.628	4,6
1985-86	1.096	458	8.852	8,1

Table 1. Data from the Guides of the Vacations in Farmhouses. Sources: Carazo 1982; Olmedo and Carmona, 1997.

The Vacations in Farmhouses Program was not transferred to the autonomous communities, when the administrative reorganization began to take its first steps

and the different regions to project their tourism policy on the territory. Only Catalonia and the Valencian Community had some continuity in the offer of rural accommodation, while other regions took a few years to publish their own rural tourism guides, with a different categorization for each type of accommodation, depending on whether we were in Asturias, Andalusia, Galicia, Navarra or Castile and León (Olmedo and Carmona, 1997; Canoves et al, 2005; Rio, 2016). At this stage, the work of the Local Action Groups and the regional policies tried to promote tourism as an economic and employment alternative to the agricultural sector, thinking that its rapid development would allow to fix population and reverse the recessive demographic dynamics.

With the arrival of the twenty-first century, policies to promote tourism in rural areas move away from investment in traditional accommodation and focus on the multiplication of recreational activities, enhancement of natural resources, cultural theming projects, promotion of active tourism companies, quality local productions, health tourism, gastronomic tourism or wine tourism (Cánoves et al, 2005). The sector specializes and becomes professionalized, leaving aside the primitive model of income supplementation, especially in those interior areas with sufficient resources and proximity to demand centres, while, in other more peripheral rural territories, the few initiatives are abandoned and investments are redirected to other activities and services.

Tables 2 and 3 offer different indicators of the INE statistics of rural tourism accommodation and hotel tourism between 2001 and 2021. The numbers of establishments and places correspond to the data of the months of August of each year, when the offer is highest, passengers and overnight stays are annual, and the average stay and occupation is obtained by crossing the capacity data of August with the annual totals. In the tables can be seen how the number of rural tourism establishments grows, while the number of hotels remains more stable. The data for 2021 translate into figures the effects of the pandemic on tourism activity. Since 2019 there are more rural tourism establishments than hotels, although the number of places is much higher, around 10 hotel places for each rural tourism bed. The evolution of the ratio of establishments / places grows, both in rural tourism and in hotel tourism, from 8.09 to 9.74 and from 79.69 to 110.84, respectively, showing the process of adjustment and requalification of tourist establishments. Thus, the 14,813 hotels in 2021 offer more places than the 16,217 in 2001. In terms of demand, the number of passengers and overnight stays grows at a faster rate in rural tourism, which practically multiplies these indicators by four between 2001 and 2019, compared to the more moderate growth in hotel tourism, which multiplies by two passengers and by 1.5 overnight stays in the same period. The two indicators with the worst tourism results are those that appear below. The average stay has been reduced considerably, almost continuously between 2001 and 2021, both in rural and hotel tourism. Rural tourism accommodations had an average stay of 3.02 nights in 2001, registering 2.65 nights in 2019. On the other hand, the hotels had an average stay of 3.81 nights in 2001 and 2.84 in 2021. It is noteworthy how in this year 2021 rural tourism accommodations have for the first time an average stay slightly higher

than the average hotel stay, 2.89 compared to 2.84. However, the last indicator reveals the chiaroscuro of rural tourism, since the average occupation is reduced in its year of greatest percentage, 2001, to 21.6%. In other words, during the entire period analysed, out of every 10 rural tourism rooms at least 8 were empty, and in 2014 almost 9 out of 10. In the case of hotel tourism, if we exclude the 2021 data, the occupancy rate is more positive and stands at around 45-50%.

The combined analysis offered in Tables 2 and 3 shows the growth of the rural tourism offer in recent decades, compared to hotel infrastructure, but also the difficulties for economic sustainability that can be deduced from such low occupancy rates.

Rural Tourism	2001	2007	2014	2019	2021
Establishments	5.728	11.816	16.086	18.285	17.321
Places	46.354	107.270	152.206	179.171	168.714
Ratio Est/places	8,09	9,07	9,46	9,79	9,74
Passengers	1.210.890	2.645.237	2.822.946	4.421.397	3.350.225
Overnight stays	3.660.815	7.938.622	7.750.576	11.726.030	9.690.951
Average stay	3,02	3,00	2,74	2,65	2,89
Average occup.	21,6%	20,2%	13,9%	17,9%	15,7%

Hotel Tourism	2001	2007	2014	2019	2021
Establishments	16.217	16.125	16.807	16.943	14.813
Places	1.292.417	1.566.782	1.765.755	1.856.265	1.641.955
Ratio Est/places	79,69	97,16	105,06	109,55	110,84
Passengers	59.904.301	84.423.433	87.814.529	108.716.047	60.437.585
Overnight stays	228.681.569	271.689.482	292.260.630	342.995.594	172.160.867
Average stay	3,81	3,21	3,32	3,15	2,84
Average occup.	48,4%	47,5%	45,3%	50,6%	28,7%

Tables 2 and 3. Supply and demand in rural tourism establishments and hotels. Source: ine.es

The concept of empty Spain, or emptied, as it is usually used with critical intention, tries to expose the contrast in the evolution of the distribution of the population compared to the full or filled Spain. On the one hand, it is a rural Spain with a sparsely inhabited interior with densities lower than 10 inhabitants/km² (Figure 3) and on the other, urbanized and coastal Spain with high concentrations of population. The aforementioned density is usually used in Europe as a minimum threshold, defining as demographic desert the areas that have a lower density. That is why there is also mentioned in the media the Spanish Lapland (Cerdá, 2017), a large extension that runs through the Spanish Iberian system covering territories of ten provinces, from Zaragoza to Valencia, where the density does not reach 7 inhabitants/km² (Burillo et al, 2019).

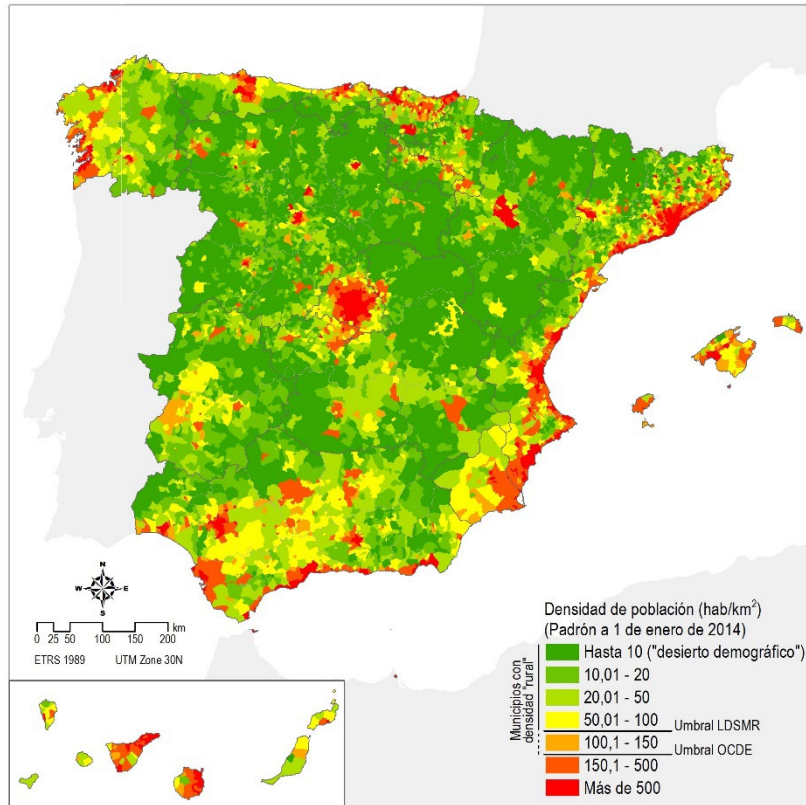


Fig. 3. Density of Spanish municipalities in 2014. Source: Jurado and Pazos, 2016.

Among the 50 Spanish provinces, in 2021 only 10 had a population lower than that one registered in 1900. In that year just seven of them had a density of less than 20 inhabitants/km². These 10 provinces: Ávila, Cuenca, Huesca, Lugo, Ourense, Palencia, Segovia, Soria, Teruel and Zamora (Figure 4) are according to statistic numbers the most emptied provinces in Spain. All are provinces in the North of Spain, interior except Lugo, and all have almost the same population in 1833 and 2021, except for Cuenca, Soria and Teruel, the heart of Spanish Lapland, which today have many fewer inhabitants than 200 years ago. Table 4 shows the demographic evolution of these 10 provinces between 1833 and 2021. Most of them - Ávila, Lugo, Ourense, Palencia, Segovia, Soria and Zamora- show a positive evolution between 1833 and 1950. From this date, which roughly supposes the industrialization of Spain, they begin to decline. Cuenca, shows an irregular behaviour, with two large declines, one in the first half of the nineteenth century and another in the second half of the twentieth century. Huesca reaches its maximum population in 1900 and shows in the last period a slight increase, being the only one of the 10 provinces that improves in the XXI century. Teruel, on the other hand, experienced a slight increase during the nineteenth century, reaching its peak in 1900. Then it

initiated a moderate decline in the first half of the twentieth century that accelerated critically in recent decades.



Fig. 4. Provinces of the emptied Spain. Source: ine.es

	1833	1857	1900	1950	2000	2021
Ávila	137.903	164.039	200.457	251.030	165.615	158.854
Cuenca	334.582	229.959	249.696	335.719	201.141	199.004
Huesca	214.874	257.839	244.867	236.232	206.587	221.407
Lugo	357.272	424.186	465.386	508.916	362.565	326.537
Ourense	319.038	371.818	404.311	467.903	340.322	305.151
Palencia	148.491	185.970	192.473	233.290	176.371	158.549
Segovia	134.854	146.839	159.243	201.433	147.623	154.056
Soria	115.619	147.468	150.462	161.182	91.270	89.420
Teruel	218.403	238.628	246.001	236.002	137.086	133.253
Zamora	159.425	249.162	275.545	315.885	201.777	169.457
ESPAÑA	12.286.941	15.464.340	18.618.086	27.976.755	40.470.182	47.398.695

Table 4. Demographic evolution of the emptied provinces of Spain 1837-2021. Source: ine.es

If we return to the data with which we began this work, we find that two of the most depopulated provinces in Spain, Ávila and Huesca, are among the territories with the largest number of rural establishments. In August 2021, the INE statistics counted 731 rural tourism houses in Ávila and 663 in Huesca. It is related to the demand of the metropolitan areas of Madrid and Zaragoza, respectively. However, if we differentiate between rural tourism establishments in coastal, inland and emptied provinces as reflected in Figure 3, it can be seen how the establishments of emptied Spain represent approximately the 15% of the total, compared to the 35%

of those located in coastal provinces. Looking at the offered places, establishments in emptied provinces provide a greater number of places per unit, especially in August. These numbers of rural tourism in coastal provinces cover a high percentage of accommodations, that depend more on their proximity to the coast in relation to sun and beach tourism than on the rural character of their location (Sánchez and Sánchez, 2021).

The data provided by the Statistical National Institute (INE) allow a provincial disaggregation, so we can differentiate the statistics of rural tourist supply and demand in coastal provinces, inland provinces and "emptied" provinces, as showed in figures 5 to 9.

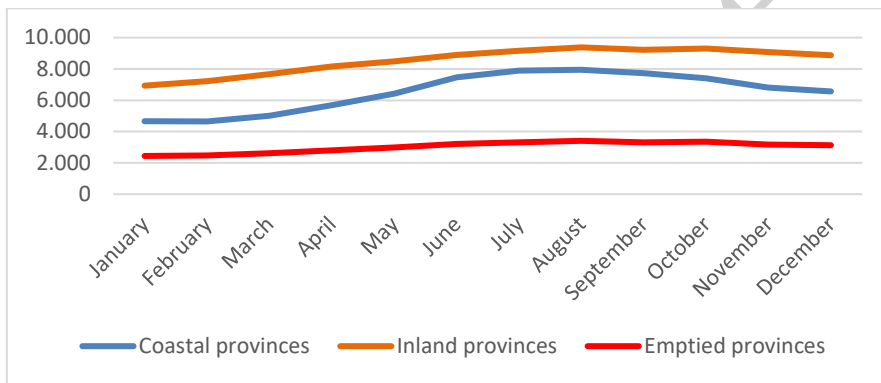


Fig. 5. Rural tourism establishments opened in Spain in 2021. Source: ine.es

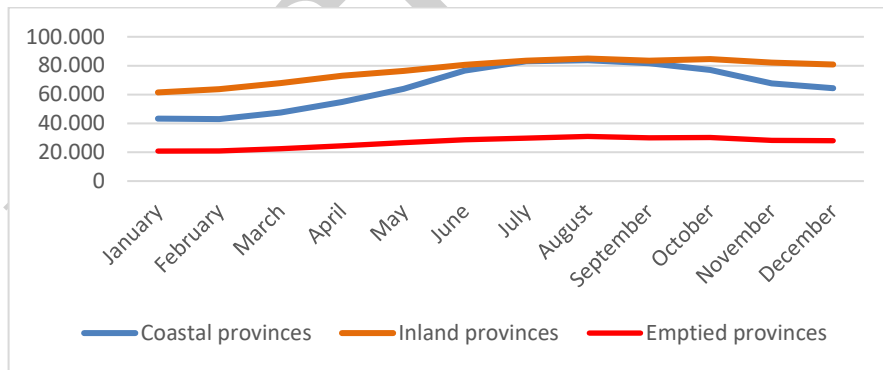


Fig. 6. Places in rural tourism establishments opened in Spain in 2021. Source: ine.es

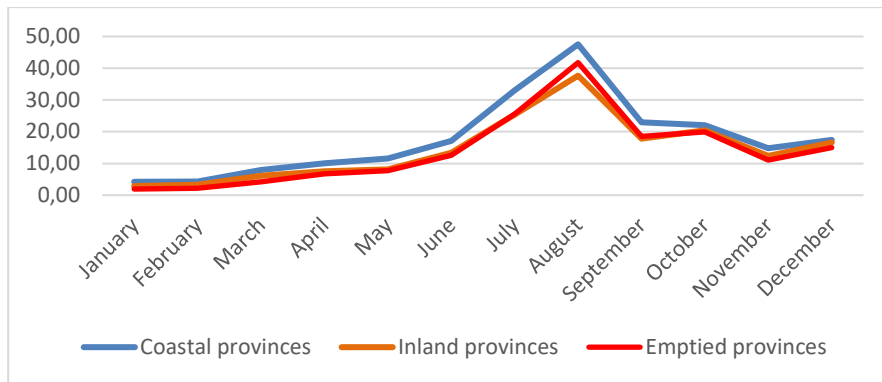


Fig. 7. Occupancy rate in rural tourism establishments in Spain in 2021. Source: ine.es

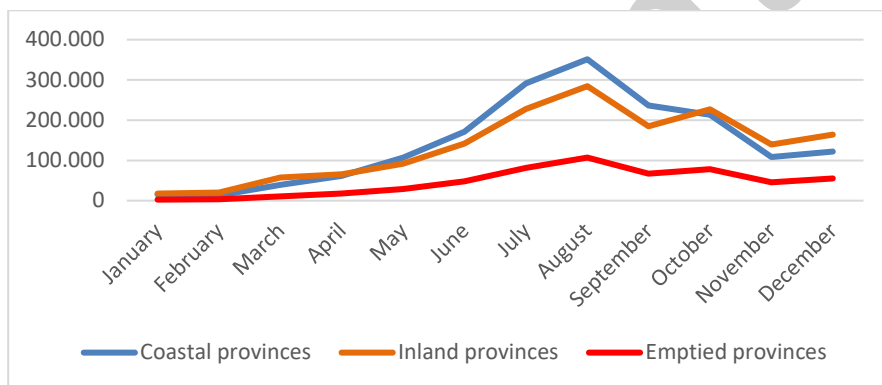


Fig. 8. Passengers in rural tourism establishments in Spain in 2021. Source: ine.es

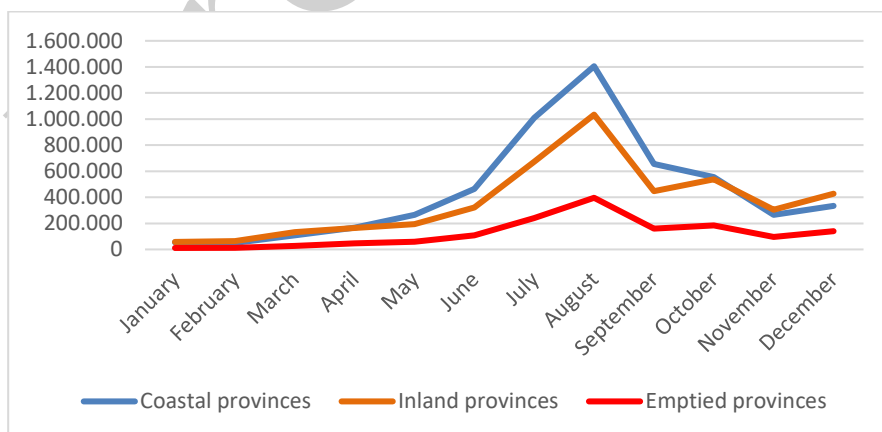


Fig. 9. Overnight stays in rural tourism establishments in Spain in 2021. Source: ine.es

Figures 5 and 6 show how the supply varies according to the months, especially in the case of the coastal provinces. The number of establishments (Fig. 5) in the inland provinces was lowest in January, at 6,993, compared with 9,377 in August, an increase of 34 %. Between June and December the number of establishments in the inland provinces remained fairly stable. In the coastal provinces, January recorded 4,661 establishments and August 7,947, an increase of 70.5%, with a clear peak between June and September. The emptied provinces had 2,442 establishments opened in January and 3,409 in August, an increase of 39.6%. The seasonality of the offer and the different behaviour of the coastal provinces can be seen more clearly in the supply of tourist places (Fig. 6). In the inland provinces, the difference in the supply of places between January and August represents an increase of 38.2%, in the empty provinces 48.8% and in the coastal provinces 93%.

According to the demand data, the occupation (Fig. 7) shows a very similar behaviour between inland provinces and emptied provinces. There is a slight higher record in emptied provinces in August, thanks to the higher than 50% occupancy in Lugo, Huesca and Ourense, while Segovia or Cuenca do not exceed 27%. The number of passengers and overnight stays (Fig. 8 and 9) show the low prominence of the 10 emptied provinces compared to the establishments located in the 22 coastal provinces.

Final Remarks

Rural tourism and nature tourism are tourist modalities that take place far from urban areas. Therefore both can be a new activity for those Spanish territories placed outside urban-industrial development and weakened since the middle of the last century by a constant demographic bleeding. However, the poor accessibility of these places, which leads to other development deficits, is also a brake on their touristic possibilities. Moreover, due to the own characteristics of both tourist modalities, their economic development won't be never equivalent to that of other massive tourist modalities, such as the sun and beach model of the Spanish coasts. So, it is inappropriate to believe that this tourism can become an engine of development for an extensive territory. The rural places that are near and well connected to the metropolitan areas will be raised as preferred destinations for tourists who wish to practice these modalities, reporting contributions to local economies. A high percentage of rural accommodation establishments, that are located in provinces with coastline, are actually oriented to sun and beach tourism. More remote regions depopulated and with fewer services and infrastructures will remain without tourists, in spite of the fact that there were many rural houses that were financed with European funds. This is confirmed in different investigations that focus their analysis on the effects of LEADER programmes in such areas as well as the ongoing existence of subsidized business based on tourism projects. (González y Macías, 2014; Arcila y López, 2015; Paül et al, 2016; Navarro et al, 2018; Moriche et al, 2021). The study of Sierra de Gata and the Jerte Valley shows that approximately the 50% of business projects related to tourist accommodation closed after few years of being open (Moriche et al, 2021).

However, these lights and shades of exogenous tourism in emptied Spain do not mean that this territory is a wasteland. Until few decades ago these regions were the livelihood of thousands of people, so in a future they can return to be productive. If appropriate policies are promoted on these places according with its reality, they can be economically and socially active with a population lower than they had two centuries ago (Somoza, 2004; Plaza 2006). Rural spaces have survived throughout their long history as productive spaces. They must remain as landscapes in production, otherwise we will continue to sorrow for their slow agony without giving any solution. *Sine agriculture nihil*, "without agriculture nothing" says the motto of the agronomists. It also should have been the motto of rural development from the beginning. New rurality must be in productive landscapes, not productivist, with sustainable and quality crops and cattle.

In relation of the tourist function in these emptied regions, it's more appropriate to encourage the so-called return tourism, the seasonal or definitive return of families with roots in these towns. Concrete measures should promote the implementation of productive activities and services for the resident population and the rehabilitation and habitability of second residences.

The resilience of sparsely populated regions lies in the identity bonds and in the attachment feeling of the emigrated population. It's worth to recover the cultivated space -the ager- with agro-livestock productions of good quality, designated with seals of origin and with high added value. In this context, the surplus value of being distributed in the chain of intermediaries has to be avoided thanks to short circuits of commercialization. Food security and valorisation of the agro-livestock heritage of these regions must be promoted.

Women, men and their descendants, who return temporarily in the summer or permanently when they retire, should be the agents of change, if services and employment opportunities permit it.

Therefore many steps must be done, but always taking into account that the population to whom aid programs should be directed are the residents and the emigrated population that maintains links with their places of origin.

Professor Delgado Urrecho (2018) highlights the importance of the population linked to these places. Emigrated people who maintain properties in the villages and who periodically return to these villages, promote the creation of jobs and equipment. That was revealed in each province by the Survey of Infrastructures and Local Equipment. For professors Pérez and García (2018) this population would be the protagonist of what they call "country tourism". In their study case placed in Extremadura, they study the periodic return of tens of thousands of people. The authors analyse through surveys the loyalty of these movements (i.e. 85% of the Extremaduran that emigrated to Madrid), their average expenditure (more than 1,000 euros for the 41% of the interviewed persons) or the duration of stays (more than two weeks in 70% of the cases). This type of displacement in summer is typical of areas of emigration and it normally supposes the reactivation of economic and social activities. Every summer in the north of Portugal thousands of emigrants with their families return from France to spend the holidays in remote villages of Tras Os

Montes. There is easy to hear the French language in the streets. Portuguese authorities celebrate this return with dozens of parties to welcome them publicly.

In our research data show how the offer of rural and nature tourism has grown in Spain since the late twentieth century, driven by rural development programs financed with European funds. The increase of rural tourism establishments and public subsidies generated for some time a false conviction, according to which this activity could become an alternative development for rural areas located far from urban regions.

Data reveal the unsustainability of some rural touristic businesses due to the low occupancy and the high seasonality. Provinces near Madrid accumulate a relatively important demand for rural tourism, although this is insufficient to cover the thousands of accommodation places. It is true that in a pandemic context rural tourism is perceived as safer than others touristic modalities. This fact has increased recent occupancy rates and reawakened the idea of rural tourism as an alternative activity to agriculture (Dot et al, 2022; Zaar, 2022). Probably the reduction of restrictions from 2022 and the increase in confidence in tourism demand will attenuate this slight growth of tourism in rural areas, especially in the emptied provinces of Spain. In these territories resilience is based on affective links and patrimonial ties of the emigrated population.

This work has tried to show how the sustainability of rural and nature tourism in emptied Spain is threatened. The low socio-economic profitability of investments, that for two decades have tried to create new tourist destinations, must reorient the actions towards a tourism of returned people, which fill these villages during the summer. More studies of this type of tourism must be done to know its true impact in emptied Spain.

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