

MASTER IN MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Academic Year 2020/2021

Giulia Balestracci

***Rural tourism as tool for the socio-economic development for
rural areas post-Covid19.
Agro- cooperativism in the rural Catalonia.***

FINAL MASTER PROJECT

Academic tutor prof. Paolo Antonio Russo



UNIVERSITAT ROVIRA I VIRGILI

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Acronyms

AR Autonomous Region of Spain

CAP Common Agricultural Policy

EEG Evolutionary Economic geography

GAL Group of Local Action

GDP Gross Domestic Product

LC Local community

QL Quality of life

RRN Red Rural Nacional (Rural National Net)

RT Rural tourism

REs Rural Establishments/Accommodations

RP Reasearch problem

RQ Research questions

SMEs Small Medium Enterprises

SDG Sustainable Development Goals

TALC Tourism Area Life Cycle

UNTWO World Tourism Organization

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WOW Way of working

1 Introduction

1.1 Disciplinary positioning of the work, research problem e research objectives

In the last decade, rural tourism has become one of the largest sources of income for Spanish rural areas (Albaladejo I.P 2003), which has experienced a constant increase in tourism presence in the last decades, as shown in the statical data. This work aims to problematize the rural tourism boost produced by the new scenario that the global sanitary and economic crisis has opened since 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has represented a massive threat to the worldwide tourism industry. Tourist stakeholders, starting with the public authorities, face the challenge of reactivating tourism, avoiding a return to the pre-Covid tourism model, which seems the most likely outcome. The ideal situation would instead be planning an alternative tourism model that considers a more sustainable development. It can be possible by proposing tourism degrowth for the massive tourist destinations, as the Costa Brava in Catalonia, in favor of a redistribution of the tourism flows within the rural areas thanks to new experiential tourist products design.

COVID-19 has put into question the global touristification model, demonstrating an increasing social vulnerability. The current pandemic has had a global intensity and incidence like none of the previous socio-economic crises (Cañada, 2020). Recovery can be harder and more expensive, especially for the travel sector, considering the imposed mobility restrictions, which have provoked a drop in international tourism. This industry has shown instability due to its dependence on an inherently volatile global economy; exception made for the resilient domestic demand. The longer the duration of the current crisis, the more the productive structure of the economy, and the tourism sector, can be transformed worldwide. In this new scenario, some types of proximity tourism have been advantaged. In Catalonia, it has happened with the increase of rural tourism thanks to the resilient domestic market, driven by the new tourism trends provoked by the mobility restrictions. Some rural areas have been chosen as destinations for open-air activities and traditional lifestyles (McGivney, 2020 – in Fletcher, 2020).

This work aims to analyze the certain types of socio-economic problems that internal areas in Catalonia present, such as the reduced level of development and lower quality of life. Rural tourism has been investigated as a tool to contrast issues as depopulation and economic diversification, with an overview on its life-cycle (Butler, 1980) in Catalonia and broadly Europe and Spain.

Does rural tourism generate the hoped outcomes? As emerged from this literature, rural tourism represents an essential element to support the development of agricultural areas in Catalonia. However, it still shows heterogeneity in its offer, low-quality products, and unprofessionalism in Catalonia's rural tourism supply structure (Cànoves, 2005), which does not achieve the welfare for the local population that it is supposed to generate. The stakeholders involved have been analyzed, starting with public institutions and their political agenda. The stress has been on the SMEs' characteristics and successful examples in Catalonia that have had a significant impact within the territory. Innovative forms of collaboration in tourism have been a focus for this work, recognizing the key role agro-cooperativism plays in improving living conditions in rural areas. Priorat eno-cooperatives and cooperation forms in Lleida province have relaunched the agricultural processes and patrimonialize the local culture, thanks to the revalorization of the local resource like wine, oil, and landscape, obtaining quite success in the diversification of the rural economy. This tourist destination competitiveness improvement has been possible thank to the joined efforts that counted with European and public fonds (NEXTGeneration, LEADER and PRODER). These grants have been deeply studied as essential financing means to support rural tourism projects' development. On the other hand, their successful use has also been possible thanks to public agents' action as local institutions and GALs (Local Action Groups).

This project also seeks to put on the table of the international debate a reflection on which kind of strategic planning and policies in Catalonia, or more broadly, should be designed for sustainable rural tourism development in the short and long term. International agents as UNTWO and European Commission, their actions and political agenda have been analyzed as macro references in terms of rural development and sustainability international guidelines, as SDGs and Agenda 2030. As Cànoves (2005) highlights, the most important thing is not the

growth at any levels, but the rational and non-disruptive use of the socio, cultural and environmental resources in the long-term, ensuring the sustainable development of these rural areas.

This work aims to make a point for (international) scholars, and also residents about rural tourism development in agricultural areas in Catalonia, using updated information to offer an overview of the challenges and opportunities post-Covid. It also includes examples of successful initiatives that link agriculture and tourism as best practices to be considered a starting point for people interested in understanding and collaborating in these activities.

1.2 Personal positioning of the work

I am a young European woman and I define myself as a sensible person, especially in terms of social and environmental worries. My interests include global justice and equality, climate change and general worry about the future of our planet.

The SDGs are for me the basis that should guide every action on the Earth, following an idyllic and utopic vision where actions and decisions should be taken thinking about the consequences for the next generations and for the environment.

I am Giulia Balestracci and I come from Santa Maria a Monte, a little village in the countryside of Tuscany, Italy. I grew up in the big countryside house of my family for generations, surrounded by olive trees and vineyards, close to “*il padule*”.

The “padule” is the area of the ancient Lago di Sesto, located between Lucca and Pisa, that during XVI - XIV has been converted to farmland and, around the time of Italian unification, divided amongst tenant farmers, such as my great-grandfather. My family still works those lands, and they taught me the love for the *land* that gives us all we need to live.

When I decided to study tourism, my dream was to promote (sustainable) tourist activities in my village, a typical “Tuscan medieval little village on top of the hill”.

A new economic activity by that time was - as it is still today - needed to generate extra incomes and job opportunities to avoid the abandonment of the land and traditional activities. Tourism might be a great opportunity for economic diversification to support the primary activities, not substitute them, avoiding situations of *monoculture* and preventing situations of

market dependence.

A strong gastronomic culture and love for the “*prodotto primo*”, the raw material, are innate for me and I like buying them from farmers or little markets. I am a big supporter of “*Slow food*” movement, which since the 1980s has been promoting, first in Italy and then at international level, the importance of giving the right value to the food and with respect to its producers who work in harmony by local traditions with the environment and the ecosystems.

My journey in tourism headed the right way when I moved to Barcelona, Catalonia, to attend a Masters in sustainable management of tourism destinations in natural areas, when I learned how to look at tourism, life and society aspects through a different perspective.

From the first moment, Catalonia has been familiar, reminding me of Tuscany, but also different due to its historical and political context. It offers an incredible heritage of landscapes and ecosystems, agricultural traditions, gastronomical treasures and cultural prosperity.

In 2019, I traveled for several months in South America to experience rural community life.

Staying with indigenous community made me reflect on our relation with nature. Listening to the *sabios* explaining the relevance of the *pachamama* reminded me of what my grandfather and the slow food movement taught me with different words. The focus should be on the land, its resources and their conservation together with the traditions. It is fundamental for us and for the future generation.

Capitalism has evolved and the globalization process affects the entire world. Our economic systems have dramatically changed in the last decades. Natural resources have been incrementally used to place more products in the international market. Countries had to specialize, and produce huge amounts of products to maintain the international demand. International and mass tourism highly supported this tendency (Gascón 2012).

In 2019, the health pandemic due to Covid hit the entire world, and the economy and society have been passing through a series of instability and changes. Tourism has suffered a lot.

Globalized systems and activities that implied travelling (abroad) had to be resilient and adapt to a new situation. All sorts of people and societies had to do the same too.

I decided to come back to university. During this new path at URV, I have opted for an internship in Alba Sud, which is a Catalan association specialized in research and

communication, well-known both in Spain and Latin America for its compromise towards a social change in favour of societies with higher levels of equity and social well-being. Alba Sud aims to contribute to the improvement of strategies, tools and interventions in favour of a balanced and fair development. I have chosen Alba Sud for its pro-activism in terms of *responsible tourism* and for its care towards *fair work*. As well, for its interest in *The Commons of the Earth*, such as climate, land, water, territory, landscape, agriculture and food. Alba Sud divulges ideas, alternatives and resistance to promote the Great Transition beyond capitalism and industrialism, which inspired this research project with the help of Ernest Cañada, my internship tutor and Alba Sud founder.

To summarise, this essay represents a challenge – also for a foreigner as I am – to deeply understand and explain the agro-tourism movement in Catalonia, before and after Covid-19, and highlight the role that rural tourism can play in the safeguarding of agricultural territories and traditions. Amongst the main objectives of this research project, there is the desire to underpinner how residents in Catalonia have organized themselves to pursue territorial and agricultural goals, and exactly what role has been played by touristic activities along this process.

1.3 Master's topics related to this work

This work takes into consideration different topics analyzed during the Masters of Tourism Destination Management at URV. Firstly, it includes tourism evolution in Spain, studied in Destination Planning and Management (DPM) and Place and Space (DPS) subject. The TALC and EEG model has been applied to analyze the RT development in Europe, Spain, and Catalonia, studied in DPS and Destination Management and System (DMSO). Statistical and economic data have been handled from EUROSTAT.eu, INES.es, and Indescat.cat as learned in the Economy module, managing then quantitative data and translating them into graphics (bars, circle, linear) to a better information comprehension as practiced in Quantitative data subject.

Geographical data have been also included with the elaboration of a map, following the teaching of Cartography lessons, to visualize the geographical distribution of rural accommodation in Catalonia thanks to Instamap.cat. A marketing base has been used to read the different strategic plans and action plans at the macro and micro levels.

From the Innovation and Creativity in Tourism subject, topics like innovation, juridical forms, and new technologies have inspired this project like cluster and competitiveness issues, studied in the Tourism Sector and System. Topics as sustainability, networking, policies, and governance studied in DPM have been central for this work development allow the analysis of the recovery plan and the suggestions elaboration. The acknowledgment of eno-tourism in the Priorat comes from a school trip and the classes of DMSO.

1.4 Structure of the work

The first chapter is dedicated to introducing rural tourism as a tool for enhancing the socio-economic conditions in rural areas with a focus at the regional level of Catalonia, in Spain, after the Covid-19 pandemic, which has created the conditions for a boost the RT development of RT. In the work positioning, the topic problematization has been delighted, specifying Catalan internal areas characteristics. The research objectives have been explained, involving the opportunities and challenges that RT has faced before the pandemic, the ones in place after the Covid-19 explaining its deficits, and this project' key fundings. Then, a brief introduction about who I am, my background, and my interests in the research topic. Then, follow the explanation of the Masters' topics that have been taken into account as the basis for this work's development and explain its structure.

In chapter 2, an in-depth bibliography review has focused on the definition of the RT and the explanation of rural territories into rural destinations evolution in Europe and Spain. A subsection has been dedicated to highlighting the agents involved in this destination's transformation, starting with the international macro-level (UNTWO, EU) and then the national and regional levels. The funding that these agents grant for the rural development, the relevant networks involved and their goals. The RT geography in Catalonia has been contextualized, including the REs categorization information, and some statistical data about

the RT evolution as support for the RQs. The phenomenon of cooperativism in agro-areas has been analysed from its historical beginning to the advantages that it can provide for a consistent RT development, with an overview on the European benchmarks and a comparison case about Italy. The following section regards the current opportunities and challenges that RT faces post-COVID19 in a framework at look at the international, national, and regional levels. To finalize with a SWOT analysis to describe the key factors on Rt evolution in Catalonia towards its improvement and professionalization.

In chapter 3, the methodology used for this work has been explained divided into two sections; the first one explains the literature, the research problem sources, the qualitative and quantitative data, and the technique of analysis used in the lights of the RQs. The second one deals with the analytical framework key factors and criteria have been considered to evaluate the success of RT at the territorial level, with a focus on the SMEs and the rural development initiatives.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to a deep analysis of Catalonia case study. It includes the RT explanation at the geographical level based on the elaborated maps for a visual understanding. Then, a subsection about the framework of the RT agents and networks in Catalonia, another for highlighting the RT political agenda pre and post-Covid19 in Catalonia, focusing on the strategic tourism plan in place in Catalonia the recent changes. In particular, subsection 4.3 regards the RT best practices in Catalonia, where the chosen case studies have been deeply explained, starting from the counterexample of Priorat and then focusing on the ones in the Lleida province. The opportunities for RT from the European funding have been highlights, with special attention to the recent NEXTGeneration to recover from the pandemic. Then, the risks and challenges for the RT improvement in Catalonia in the light of the sustainability principles, stressing the importance of collaborative forms, like cooperatives. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions resuming the outcomes of the work, the enlightenment about what I have learnt from this research project elaboration, how I have answered the RQs based on the results of this work, how I will use this knowledge, and what I will do next. In the Bibliography chapter, all the sources used have been organized following the APA method.

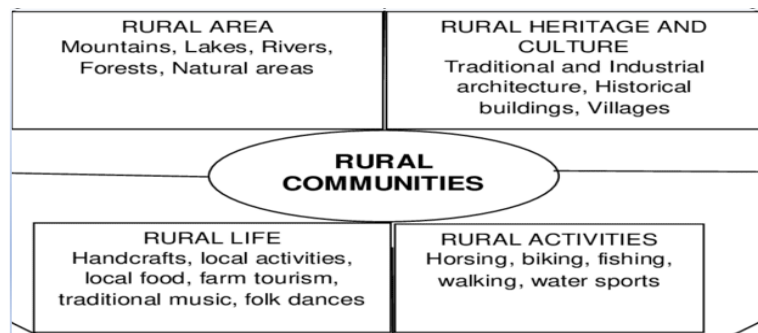
2 Background literature

2.1 Rural tourism definition

Rural tourism is one of the most growing types of tourism in Europe in recent years (Eurostat, 2021). Firstly, what is rural tourism? Many authors along the years have been trying to define this type of tourism. All of them attribute a central role to the space where these tourist activities take place: the rural area (Barrera, 2006). It refers to its extended meaning at territorial and multifunctional level, where a complex diversity of activities is included such as agricultural, forestry, fishing, agro-industrial, and agri-food, as well as also in the areas of education and health, infrastructure improvement, transportation, financial activities, mining, energy and others (Barrera, 2006).

International entities as UNWTO (2004) understand rural tourism as "a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural culture and lifestyle, angling, and sightseeing. Rural tourism activities take place in non-urban (rural) areas with the following characteristics: i) low population density, ii) landscape and land-use dominated by agriculture and forestry and iii) traditional social structure and lifestyle"; see Fig.1.

Figure 1 Rural tourism concept. Source UNWTO (2004)



Rural cultural characteristics, traditions, and lifestyle become an immaterial heritage that can be used together with attractive natural resources and the possibility of activities such as fishing, horse riding, water sports, etc., as a basis for the development of the tourism sector and of capacities and the well-being of the vast majority.

In Europe, the most common definition for rural tourism is “the tourist activity that takes place in the rural space, which is structured by an integrated offer of services and facilities for a specific demand attracted by the autochthonous context with an interrelation with the local community” (Canovés, 2005). In this definition, it is important to point out the key role of the “specific demand”, which is “attracted by” the heritage of the rural areas.

Favorable trends for the extension of this type of tourism are, indeed, directly related to the satisfaction of new demand’s needs connected to rural lifestyle and environment, and also to the desire of escaping from the tourist congestion issue in space/time (Herranz, 1996).

To understand the outcomes from the literature review about rural tourism development, objectives, and the characteristics of this tourism and its demand Table 1 has been elaborated.

To summarise, organizations at different levels have defined and supported the development of rural tourism for its complementarity with other primary economic activities, such as agriculture, towards economic diversification.

Rural tourism is considered, in fact, a tool to stimulate local economic growth and social change for its contribution to GDP and job employment. It contrasts the typical tourism seasonality: it spreads the demand “in time” with activities during all years long, especially in Spring and Autumn, and along a wider territory, contributing to the improvement of the global competitiveness of the economy.

Table 1 Rural tourism elements Own elaboration. Source Barrera (2006)

Why does rural tourism exist?	RT objectives	RT Characteristics	RT demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existence of many attractive rural areas; - Increasing trend of tourism demand; - Compatible and supporting for primary agricultural activity; - its capability to generate positive impacts as economic growth, job opportunity for young people and women, promoting justice and equality; - its role against birthplace and, in general, rural areas abandon. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving of LQ; - Diversify economical incomes; - Provide HQ tourist experience; - Promote preservation and conservation of environment and cultural resources; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authenticity of rural areas (life style, traditions, culture...) - Local initiatives and SMEs managed by LC with direct effect on it; - Support the agricultural sector; - increasing sensibility towards ecology and healthier food and lifestyle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - from (big) urban hubs; - attracted by: the slower lifestyle connected with rurality and the interaction with the local rural communities; - environmental resources and possibility of activities as horse riding, fishing, hiking, trekking; - gastronomy, local food products, and agoshops; - comfort and disconnection from congested spaces.

2.2 Rural tourism evolution in Europe and Spain: evolution of rural territories into rural destinations

RT evolution in Europe

The Community Strategic Guidelines for rural development (Council of the European Union, 2006) defines rural tourism as a fundamental element in safeguarding the cultural and natural heritage of rural areas that also promotes employment and economic growth.

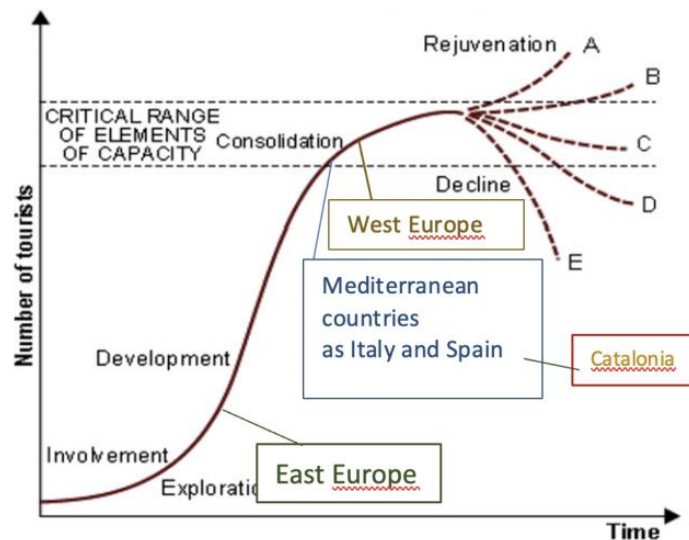
Rural tourism has been growing worldwide in the last decades, with a particular expansion in Europe (Clark & Chabrel, 2007) thanks to the favorable socio-economic situation the tourist demand is high and spreads on international and domestic markets, diversifying the tourist offer.

Many scholars affirm that the RT's growth is directly related with the need to escape from congested urban areas and the search by urban people for a natural lifestyle (Romei, 2008).

In the European continent, rural tourism experienced a strong growth both in demand and supply since the '70s, while it has moved into a more complex development phase already in the 90s (Long and Lane, 2000). Nowadays RT is a consolidated activity with a long tradition, however, it experiences a different level of development depending on the European Country and rural area in specific. (UNWTO, 2004).

In Fig. 2, the Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC, 1980) has been applied to analyze the rural tourism development between the different European areas. Whilst in the West some countries, for example, England, France, and Austria, are facing a phase of consolidation, as it occurred in the South Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Spain, after a relevant developing phase (Cànoves, Garay, Duro 2012). Some East European countries are experiencing the development phase (such as Romania and Bulgaria) while some others are still in the phase of involvement of local actors, for example, Albania (Cànoves, 2005).

Figure 2 TALC model applied to rural tourism in Europe. Owned elaboration (2021) from Cànoves 2012



Due to the spreading of the service economy almost in the whole Europe, the countryside turned into a mainly residential and recreational place. RT is, indeed, a consolidated agent of rural economy and nowadays it is on the agenda of many local, regional and national policy makers (Hall et al., 2005).

This evolution in Mediterranean countries, like Italy and Spain, has been possible thanks to the action of a plurality of actors, starting from international authorities as the EU commission and UNWTO, also national and regional public authorities, for their support in terms of regulation of the tourism sector with favorable policy to promote the rural (tourism) development. RT has integrated with the economic, social, cultural, natural, and human local structures in which it takes place (Saxena et al., 2007; Saxena and Ilbery, 2008). Also, local private stakeholders, mainly SMEs, have played an important role in investing in the rural tourism activities, often as a secondary activity, and they have collaborated in the creation of networking. For example, Italy's success in tourism is due to clusterized economies, especially at sub-provincial and sub-municipal level, characterized by the presence of a "tourist filière"; a chain of economic activities directly related to tourism production, in a very localised production system. This tight economic organization represents the key to keep growing and being competitive for Italy as a tourist economy. (Capone, 2008)

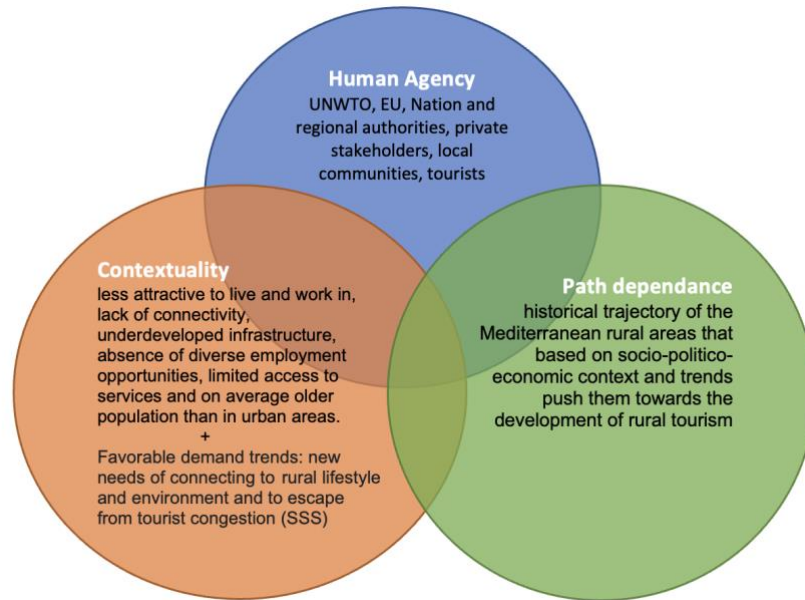
This RT development can be analyzed through the Evolutionary Economic geography (EEG) model perspective (Sanz-Ibáñez, & Clavé, 2013). The human agency, meaning the public authority – European, national and regional - and the stakeholders, through their activity and policies generate a new path (path creation) towards a new rural tourism situation.

To understand these destinations' dynamics, Figure 3 shows the evolutionary economic geography (EEG) application to the RT development. The above-mentioned public and private stakeholders represent the human agency. The contextuality of those countries have been analyzed in terms of rural territories characteristics and tourism development. The green circle highlights the path' dependence process that emerged from rural contexts and that have driven their RT development until nowadays, facing local and global changes.

RT can be interpreted as a path creation for rural territories that have experienced the diversification of the economy, and of farming income (especially for small family farms). The generation of additional benefits for the rural economy helps contrasting the depopulation of rural areas, and encourage the cultural exchange between urban and rural areas, enhancing the traditional values of rural life (Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997; Roberts and Hall, 2001; Cànoves et al., 2004).

Figure 3 EEG applied to rural tourism in Mediterranean countries (France, Italy, Spain).

Owned elaboration 2021



From the analysis of the path dependence (Fig. 3), in this new “path creation”, the rurality assumed a new role derived from a plurality of social and cultural processes supported by the human agency (public authorities, SMEs, resident community) and the evolving global context, such as the increasing mobility and integration among goods, services, people and knowledge from different territorial areas, together with a healthier lifestyle associated with a new well-being concept. Agriculture gained new significance, becoming a priority for rural development accompanied by other complementary sectors such as tourism to generate economic and social growth.

Since 2019, in this framework of postindustrial or postmodern rurality oriented toward general development, the EU has launched the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to reform the rural development policies to support “the revenge of the countryside” through the promotion of the agricultural policies, better care and financial aid to qualify and preserve the natural resources and improve the life’ quality.

Agricultural areas have become multifunctional, playing different roles from the primary one of producing food and raw materials, through the diversification of economic activities within tourism and service industry to respond to the renewed needs of the current society in terms of food, safety, environmental protection, recreational needs, and the improvement of the QL (Piñeiro and de Salvo, 2019).

It is important, also, to mention that due to pressure from speculative interests, many abandoned farmhouses and many rural built-up were converted into second homes or bed and breakfasts, while an increase of new building is threatening the most developed rural areas, for example Catalonia (la Cerdanya and Valle de Arán), in Spain (Cuadrado-Ciuraneta et al., 2017), Tuscany in Italy (Randelli et al., 2014), and Provence in France (Farmer, 2016). This phenomenon implies that in those rural areas the land is purchased by the wealthier, risking a rural gentrification (Hines, 2010). These new trends have caused a commodification of rural areas (Wood, 2007), which has brought to some reflections on the real benefits of RT's artificial and mature products that have taken distances from the original values of the territories (Cànoves, 2005).

RT evolution in Spain

RT in Spain has developed 20 years later compared to other EU Countries (Grande I, 2006). Over the past two decades, indeed, rural tourism in Spain has become established within its 17 autonomous regions and consequently, in recent years, it has become one of the most important axes concerning government development strategies in rural areas and to contrast the mass tourism of sun and beach on the Spanish coastline.

Also, the Spanish government has seen its valuable contribution to rural economies through income and employment generation, its compatibility with natural activities and conservation, and its potential to adapt to new forms of work more successfully (Cànoves, Garay, Duro, 2012).

The evolution of RT is tied to the economic and socio-demographic changes experienced by the country in the last four decades. Firstly, it passed through the industrial development in

the *franquista* period, right after WWII, then the post-industrial period when the Spanish Estate was implanted with its autonomous regions (AR) in 1976.

Before, in the 60s, Spain underwent the abandonment of the rural areas due to the agricultural crisis that generated a strong immigration to the urban areas, which coincided with the maximum expansion of mass tourism on the Mediterranean Coast.

It is in 1967 that the Ministry of Information and Tourism launched the "Casas de Labranza" (similar to the Portuguese Pousadas) to promote the agrotourism, farmhouses as a means for accommodation, recognizing the tourism as a new economic activity to generate more income and improve the quality of life of farmers.

Spain entered the CEE in 1986. In those years, the majority of the population was already living in the cities, and coastal tourism was reaching saturation point.

The domestic demand started travelling to internal regions, attracted by virgin and authentic rural landscapes distinguished by a strong territorial identity, which recalled the belonging feeling, far from artificial touristic places.

National interests drove this diversification of the so-called "post-fordistas tourist products" (Urry, 1994). At the same time, the tourist demand was already avoiding mass tourism destinations seeking new products like cultural tourism, gastronomic, patrimonial, ethnographic tourism from different markets, towards a diversification of the tourist market (Cànoves , et al. 2004).

Following the new demand' trends, public authorities and private sector raised the investments in rural areas infrastructures, indeed pioneer entrepreneurs improved the offer in terms of quantity with an exponential increase in accommodations and bed numbers (Pulido, 2008, Yagüe, 2002).

Autonomous Communities invested in agro-tourism as a strategic opportunity to contrast the abandonment of the rural areas and their depopulation, also to diversify the economy while preserving the natural and cultural heritage and distributing tourist flows from the coast line to the internal zones.

At the end of the XX century, the Spanish government faced the need of homogenizing the RT national offer and requested the Autonomous Communities to regulate rural tourism. The

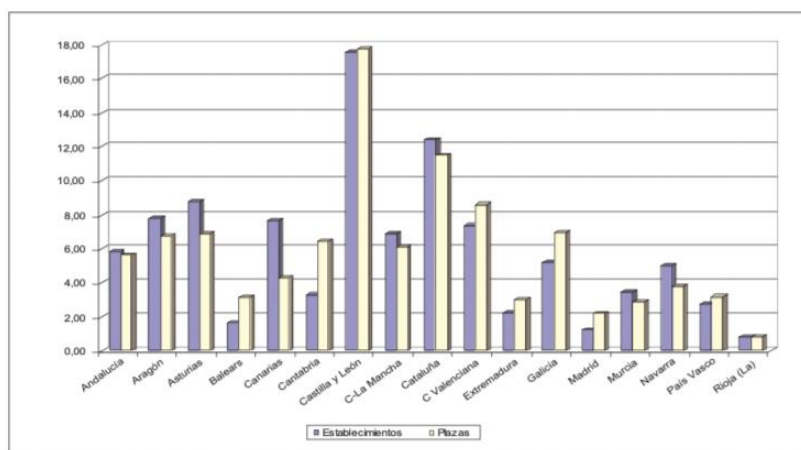
new regulation was regarding mainly accommodation: definitions, typologies, infrastructures and services, including also complementary activities (Pérez, 2008).

Only in 2008 thanks to ASETUR – Asociación Española de Casas de Turismo Rural – a new plan to homogenize the quality standards of the rural accommodations through a distinguishing feature, the spike, of common use in Europe, with a value from 1 to 5.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of RT accommodations between Spanish Autonomous regions in 2006. The AR Castilla and León was the region with higher number of RT accommodations, with more than 17% of the national amount. Catalonia and Asturias represented the second and third regions.

Figure 4 RT accommodation and beds distributions by Autonomous Region. Source INE, 2006

Distribución de establecimientos y plazas por Comunidad Autónoma



Fuente: INE.

The beginning of the new century has been characterized by the revaluation of traditions and ethnographic heritage with an important diversification and extension of the tourism offer, also thanks to products like the Romanic Route, la Vía de la Plata and especially the successful Camino de Santiago. New typologies of tourism such as gastronomic and eno-tourism strongly raised (Cànoves, 2005) and support the rural tourism development.

On 2011 TURESPAÑA¹ launched a program called “Tasting Spain” to promote gastronomic tourism, often in rural areas to promote agricultural and raw products at national and international level (Integral plan of industrial policies 2020, 2010).

Unfortunately, many public and private RT strategies have been focused on its development in the short term, regardless of regional imbalances, the supply quality, or the sustainability of the product in the long term. On the other hand, it is also important to highlight the Spanish government and Autonomous Communities efforts that have also counted on European funds called Leader and Proder projects.

After nearly twenty years of rapid development started with a preliminary stage dominated by the importance of establishing tourist accommodation, Spanish rural tourism is now entering in a consolidation phase together with a new era of specialization, diversification and professionalization.

This consolidation phase (Butler, 1980) refers mainly to the domestic demand thanks to the favorable quality-price relation and to its added-value made by the strong territorial identity. RT demand counts also for a high development margin, and thanks to the domestic demand it can represent an anti-cyclical phenomenon.

RT in Spain still represents a young product for international demand, which still recognizes Spain as a destination for the SSS tourism. The next goal is the consolidation of RT products at international level with a deep reinforcement of the homogenization at quality level and promotion of the rural offer.

Therefore, the public and private sectors are facing new challenges and opportunities in a renewed international framework, which is characterized by increasing destinations’ competitiveness, new technological requirements (Cànoves, Garay, Duro, 2012), and new demand trends, especially after Covid-19.

RT in Spain needs to adapt to a more exigent demand to compete with more mature destinations, like France or Italy, which already present a vast diversification of the offer in

¹ TURESPAÑA is the public body, attached to the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism through the Secretary of State for Tourism, responsible for marketing Spain as a travel destination in the world. www.tourspain.es

terms of specialization and quality level or new cheaper destinations out of the European area.

In the Spain Tourism Plan “Horizonte 2020”, TURESPAÑA explains the national goals regarding rural tourism of:

- Attract international tourism;
- Develop unique experience for tourist holiday with special care to quality and details;
- Improvement of RT products;
- Harmonization of the RT offer to positioning in the international market;
- Make efforts and investment in improving the management of RT

Unfortunately, before Covid, rural areas, and agriculture were suffering from lower investments, while after the pandemic the EU, Spain, and regional governments have relaunched their support towards rural areas' development. In Spain, the agro-cooperative has represented a new key element for the development of the agro-sector due to their economic and social relevance for different population segments such as young and female population sectors, RT in Spain needs to adapt to a more exigent demand to compete with more mature destinations, like France or Italy, which already present a vast diversification of the offer in terms of specialization and quality level or new cheaper destinations out of the European area.

2.2.1 Agents, funding, networks, goals

International agents

At the international level, several are the entities compromised to promote sustainable tourism development, within rural tourism.

Firstly, the UNWTO is the leading international organization in the field of tourism. It supports balanced tourism development in terms of biodiversity conservation, social welfare, and the economic security of the host countries and communities. Its mission is to contribute to the relationship's understanding between biodiversity and tourism, seeing tourist activities as a tool to conserve and protect biodiversity as the main resource for tourism destinations.

Also, UNWTO plays an important role at the global level by promoting the 17 guidelines for sustainable development (see Figure 5), which have worked as the basis for recovery plans and long-term strategies.

Figure 5 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda 2030 by UNWTO source



Between these Goals, sustainable communities, climate action, decent work, and economic growth - with attention to rural areas - and equality in terms of injustices' reduction and gender aspects.

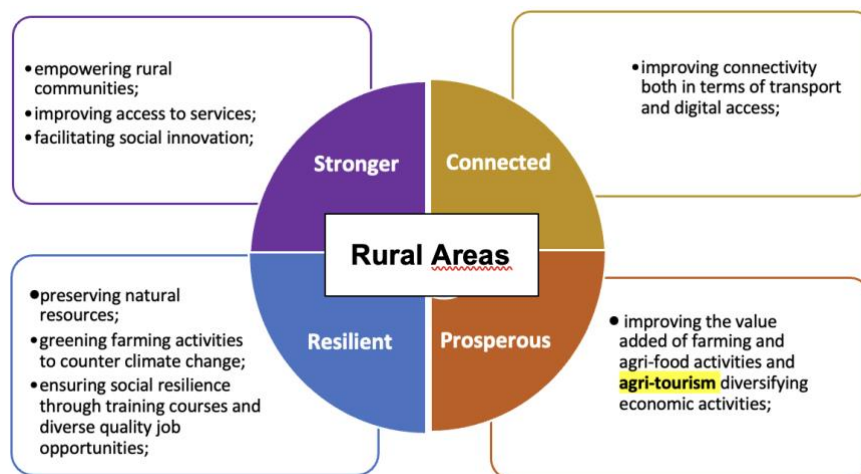
SDGs have also been taken under consideration for the development of this research work.

Another important agent in terms of aids and support directly to the rural areas, it is the European Commission. In 2020 it has put forward a “Long-term vision for EU’s rural areas”, a program where challenges, concerns, and promising opportunities faced by the rural areas have been identified together with an analysis of megatrends posed by globalization and urbanization.

This investigation has been used to elaborate a Rural Pact and a Rural Action Plan, which seek to help rural areas to become stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous, guiding them to green and digital transitions (See Fig.6).

They take under consideration the diversity of rural areas across the EU, and the characteristics that make them less attractive to live and work in, which are lack of connectivity, underdeveloped infrastructure, absence of diverse employment opportunities, limited access to services, and in general with an on average older population than in urban areas.

Figure 6 Long-term Vision for the EU's rural areas goals. Own elaboration from EU Commission



On the lessons learned from the pandemic and the consequences of industrialization and globalization, the EU aims to improve rural quality of life, achieve balanced territorial development and stimulate economic growth. For this purpose, EU has launched the NGEU and it has elaborated its “digital ambitions for 2030” including the “long-term vision for the EU's rural areas”, to *provide more opportunities for the sustainable development of rural areas beyond agriculture, farming, and forestry, developing new perspectives for the growth of manufacturing and especially services - as considered tourism - and contributing to improve the geographical distribution of services and industries* (EU, 2020).

The Rural Pact has supported the creation of a framework through existing networks where national, regional, and local actors are encouraged to exchange ideas and best practices. While the EU Rural Action Plan will represent a tool to prompt sustainable, cohesive, and integrated rural development. Some policies have been already launched as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Cohesion Policy.

The Commission will support, monitor, and update the implementation of the EU Rural Action Plan ensuring its relevance. It will also continue to maintain a close relationship with the different actors in a network to better identify and take into consideration the potential impact and implication of an EU policy initiative on rural jobs, growth, and sustainable development.

A rural observatory will be set up to improve data collection and analysis on rural areas to inform policy-making in relation to rural development and support the implementation of the Rural Action Plan.

Funding, networks, goals for rural development in Spain

In Spain there has been a lack of national rural development policies, in this sense a key role has been played by the European programs called LEADER y PRODER.

Rural tourism has been one of the main beneficiaries and thanks to the European funds the development of Spanish rural areas has been possible (Cànoves & Anton Clavé, 2012).

The European assets (FEDER, FEOGA, Cohesion Assets) have represented, among the past three decades, a key axis for rural development, together with the corresponding European and national programs with the same orientation.

Amongst the European programs, the most significant have been LEADER I y II, PRODER, EQUAL e INTERREG, to promote, develop and specialize tourist activities in the rural areas. At national level, in the 60s, the first program was the “Casas de Labranza” together with the first Pioneer initiatives for the development of RT as complementary activity to agriculture. In the 80s, the economic crisis and the Spanish’s entrance in the CEE generated relevant changes in the rural areas and the PAC reforms were launched to promote RT as the main activity in the rural areas, which became a multifunctional space in harmony with the new society’s needs.

Between 1989-1993, the first LEADER I was launched with the goals of promoting rural development in less “developed areas” and “fragile rural areas”, practically almost all of rural Spain, a part of Catalonia, Basque Countries and Madrid. Also, the first GALs – Local Action Groups (52) were created to manage the territorial development.

The majority of the projects were focused on situation diagnosis to evaluate the touristic potential, cultural heritage revalorization, improvement of infrastructures and of the touristic communication. The tourist offer and supply formulation was central with the development of tourist products accompanied by formation training (LEADER, 1993).

Unfortunately, the economic diversification did not help to avoid the depopulation or the creation of stable local networking, either innovation or education improvement.

In 1994, the second LEADER II was launched following the same goals like the constitution of stable networks, the preservation of the environmental resources, rural innovation, transnational cooperation, SMEs' promotion together with handcraft and service industry. The GALs' number grew until 132 supporting the creation of stable networks in Spain and all Europe. Due to the lack of financial resources, the Spanish government decided to invest in a Multiregional development program for the rural area economy diversification, called PRODER. This program had the mission to boost the endogenous development through economic diversification, to improve the life quality of the local population, and conserving natural resources.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the EU Commission implemented several initiatives as INTERREG III, EQUAL, URBAN II, and the LEADER+ program for rural development. It promoted the implementation of 17 autonomous programs and a horizontal Map to aid rural development strategies, interterritorial cooperation and the integration of a network.

2.3 The geography of (rural) tourism in Catalonia

Catalonia is an autonomous community in the north-East of Spain, designated as a nationality by its Statute of Autonomy. It is bordered to the north by France and Andorra, the Mediterranean Sea to the east, and the Spanish autonomous communities of Aragon to the west and Valencia to the south.

Catalonia is organized territorially into provinces, further subdivided into comarques and municipalities (see Fig. 7); the governing body is the Provincial Deputation. The four provinces are: Barcelona (5,507,813 inhab.; the second-most populated city in Spain), Girona (752,026), Lleida (439,253) and Tarragona (805,789). The official languages are Catalan, Spanish.

Figure 7 Catalonia by province. Source Catalonia, Wikipedia



Tourism contextualization

Catalonia is the first tourist destination in Spain according to the visitors' number and total income. It counts with particular geography and socio-cultural characteristics developed along the time.

Since the 60s, in the “desarrollismo franquista” period, the coast – Costa Brava in Girona’s province first, and later the Costa Dorada in Tarragona’s province- have been destinations of the classic “Sun and Beach” tourism and nowadays mass tourism destinations with negative socio-ecologic impacts.

On another hand, since 1900, the Pyrenean and the mountain region have promoted the winter tourism, and in recent years, the active and adventure tourism during all year long. Since the 1992, when Barcelona hosted the Olympic Games, and the city passed through a transformation process that positioned it on the top destination in Europe until today and converted Catalonia in a first tourist destination.

Cultural tourism, which has counted on complementary incentives, assumed an important relevance in several areas such as the Roman city of Tarraco (Tarragona), the Greco-Roman

archeological site of Ampurias, the singularities of Montserrat or the works of Dalí, Picasso and Miró in Figueres and Barcelona (Prats, 2006).

The rural tourism in internal areas was slower. As for the rest of Spain, it appears with the entrance of the country in the CEE (Economic European Community) as a compensation form for the farmers that were experiencing a strong drop of the agricultural activity, and a decrease of the incomes. The lack of supportive laws, professionals and the confusion of the service's quality create a situation for a slow development of this type of tourism.

At tourist level, in general Catalonia receive tourists from all over Spain, Europe (France, UK, Germany, Belgium, Netherland, Italy...) and the rest of the world (China, Russia, LATA, Emirates...). The four provinces count with a different type of tourism flows and seasonality, for example Tarragona and Girona count with a 3S tourism along the Costa Dorada and Costa Brava, and the pick season is mainly in summer time.

Barcelona counts with cultural, urban and events tourism and the tourism flows are distributed almost along all year long. Lleida territory suffers picks in winter and summer season, counting mainly with domestic demand

Rural tourism

RT took place at the end of '80s thanks to the CEE and its funds for the rural areas.

In Catalonia, it started to developed thanks to second-homes and, as well, to agrotourism, which was initially understood as complementary activity for the agriculture.

The Catalan Administration promoted the development of the rural tourism is located in farmers (pagesos), as complement income to maintain agricultural holdings and a source of employment for area. For this reason, originally, rural tourism accommodation in the region adopted the name of "residències-casa de pages", institutional recognized by Decree 365/83, which regulated the modality of these rural tourist accommodation and that had to be located in municipalities of less than 1000 population.

The lack of a categorization system together with the inadequate formation of tourism professional, and the misunderstanding of authenticity and minimum comfort standards, made of the "boca-boca" the more trustable information. It is important highlight that the different in

law and categories between European countries and Autonomous regions in Spain created even more chaos.

Since the beginning it turned out more as tourism in rural areas instead of agrotourism.

The Generalitat of Catalonia tried to put in order by the Decree 214/95, that redefined the accommodation modalities introducing the identification of “gites”, independent rural accommodation of reduce size to be integrally rent. Driving factors were the client's motivations and the progressive increase in supply and the new realities of the rural world. Nowadays, Catalonia is one of the more active regions in Spain in terms of RT, following the example of Basque Countries, Navarra, Galicia and the Islands, which are more mature RT destination.

The tourism supply is not yet well-structured in comparison to other European destinations such as Tuscany, in Italy or Provence, in France.

The accommodation sector results still very heterogeneous at quality and promotion level. In 2021, the register of the General Directorate of Tourism of counts with more than 2,000 establishments, and a quarter of registered establishments have already been categorized.

Since 2008, a new system of voluntary categorization has been set up for the Catalan rural tourism establishments. In harmony with the European one, the graphical representation is the “spike” used to visually and quickly identify the level of services of the establishment, one to five, see Table 2. On the other hand, the type of establishment is determined by the color of the spike: ocher-colored spike for agrotourism, and green for rural accommodation.

Last 2020, a new decree 75/2020 has been approved regarding a new regulation that identify them between two types of the RE: the farmhouse and rural accommodation, which diverge depending on whether their holders are professionals who obtain agricultural, livestock or forestry income, or not.

Table 2 Categorization of RT accommodation in Catalonia. Own elaboration.

Source Agencia Catalana de Turisme 2008

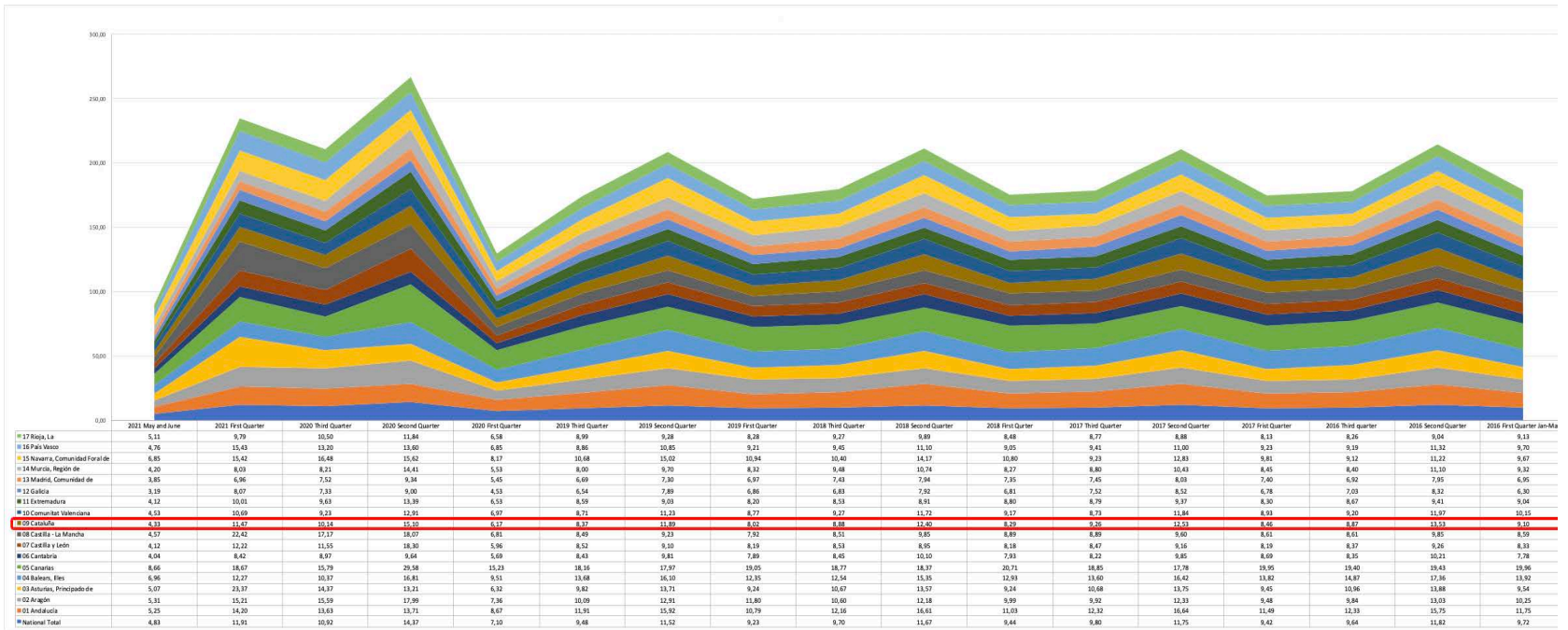
Catalan rural tourism establishments categorization			<p>The <i>parameters</i> for certifying a RT establishment are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surroundings of the rural house and the house itself. • Interior rooms. • Outdoor space. • Furniture and home furnishings for the provision of the services it advertises. • Marketing conditions. • Services (catering, reception, health...) offered to the customer. • Agrotourism, family, natural or cultural activities offered to people staying.
<i>Category name</i>	<i>Spike</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	
Basic	1	Rooms and equipment essential for the stay.	
Comfort	2	Good level of rooms and equipment.	
Great Comfort	3	Very good level of rooms and equipment.	
Upper	4	Excellent level in rooms and equipment and wide range of services. Unique environment or building.	
Superior Premium	5	Exceptional level in rooms and equipment. Emblematic building and space	

2.3.1 Statistical data

RT in Spain and Catalonia pre and post Covid19

To follow an overview on relevant statistics in terms of rural tourism in Spain and Catalonia that have been elaborated to support the object of this work.

Figure 8 Rural tourism. Overnights 2016-21 by Autonomous Regions in Spain. Own elaboration. Source Idescat 2021



The statistics regarding the overnights 2016-2021 confirm the constant evolution of rural tourism at national level, Figure 8. At the top positions for rural tourism overnights there are Canarias Islands, Baleares, Navarra and Castilla-La Mancha that already had relevant presence of rural tourism before Covid, while after the pandemic the number of overnights increased a lot due to softer restrictions compared with other regions, such as Catalonia.

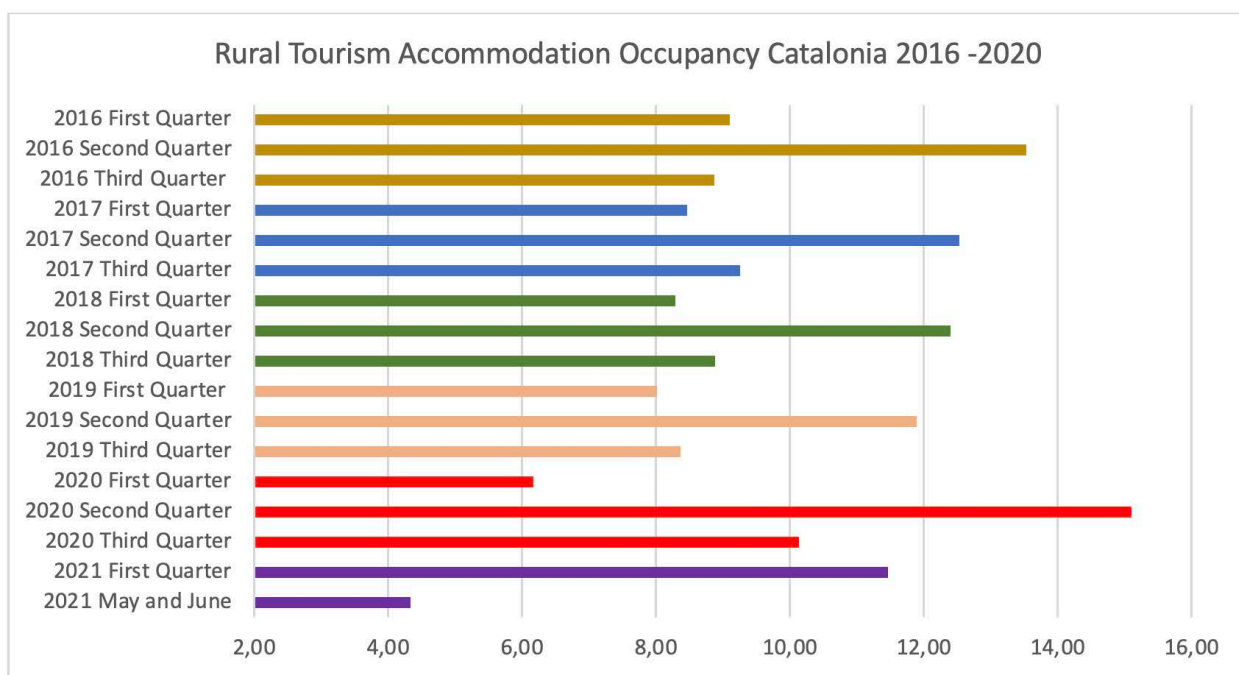
During the First Quarter of 2020, when Covid-19 overflowed in Europe, all of them suffered a big drop when quarantine and others restrictions prevented the touristic activity (note that data are not available for April 2020, for this reason the value has been 0 for all regions).

Evident is the seasonality for this type of tourism with picks during the high season (Second Quarter – from May to August).

On the other side, the Catalonia positions itself in a middle-high position with an important rise in the Second Quarter of 2020 thanks to mainly domestic tourism. The higher number of overnights comparing it to previews year is higher also for the Third Quarter 2020 and the First Quarter of 2021; while for the Second Quarter 2021 data are not available yet, but it should be taken into account that Catalonia was affected to another Covid wave and restrictions were imposed hardly in confront to other regions.

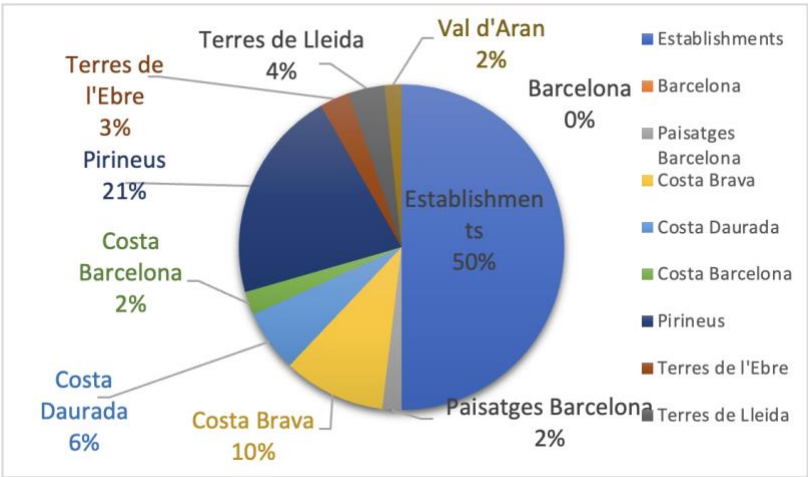
Figure 9 Rural tourism accommodation occupancy Catalonia 2016-2021. Own elaboration.

Source Idescat 2021



As Figure 9 shows, Catalonia experienced an increase in terms of overnights since 2016, with a little demotion in 2019, probably connected also to the socio-political situation due to the Catalan independentism movement. The maximum drop has been on the First Quarter of 2020, when tourism activities were suspended cause Covid-19, while the Second Quarter 2020 was a record for rural overnights thanks to the domestic demand. The Third Quarter 2020 and the First 2021 support the growth of the type of tourism in the Catalan territory.

Figure 10 Rural accommodation distribution. Catalonia 2020. Own elaboration. Source Idescat 2021



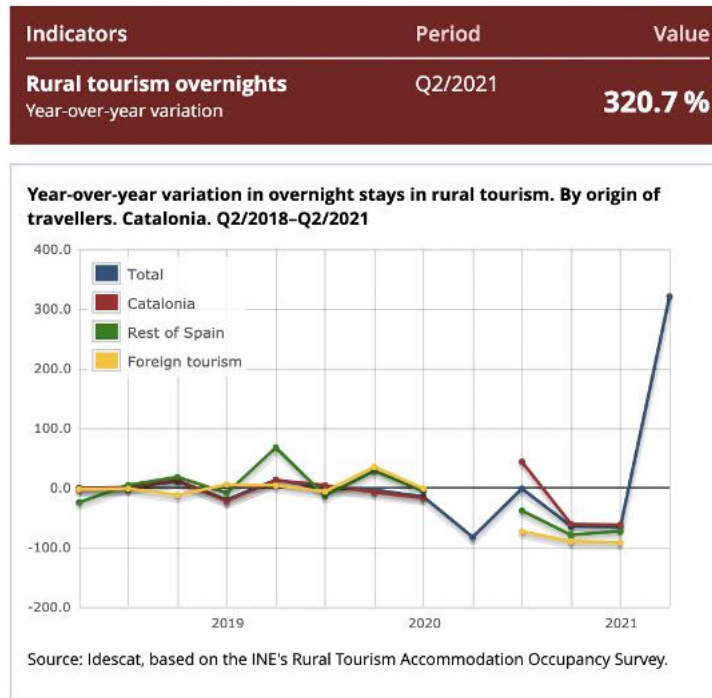
Regarding the distribution of rural accommodation in Catalonia, Figure 10, in 2020 the majority of the REs are located in Pyrenees region and on the Costa Brava (10%) and Dorada (6%), so linked with mountain and seaside areas. It confirms that the presence of these type of establishments is still significantly link to other types of tourism, as 3S and mountain ones.

Figure 11 Rural tourism. Overnight stays. By tourism brand. Catalonia. 2nd quarter 2021.
Source Idescat 2021

Rural tourism. Overnight stays. By tourism brands Catalonia. 2nd quarter 2021	
	Value
Total overnight stays	207.9
Barcelona	z
Costa Brava	53.0
Costa Daurada	12.6
Costa Barcelona	21.6
Paisatges Barcelona	29.5
Pirineus	72.8
Terres de Lleida	10.9
Terres de l'Ebre	..
Val d'Aran	..
Units: Thousands.	

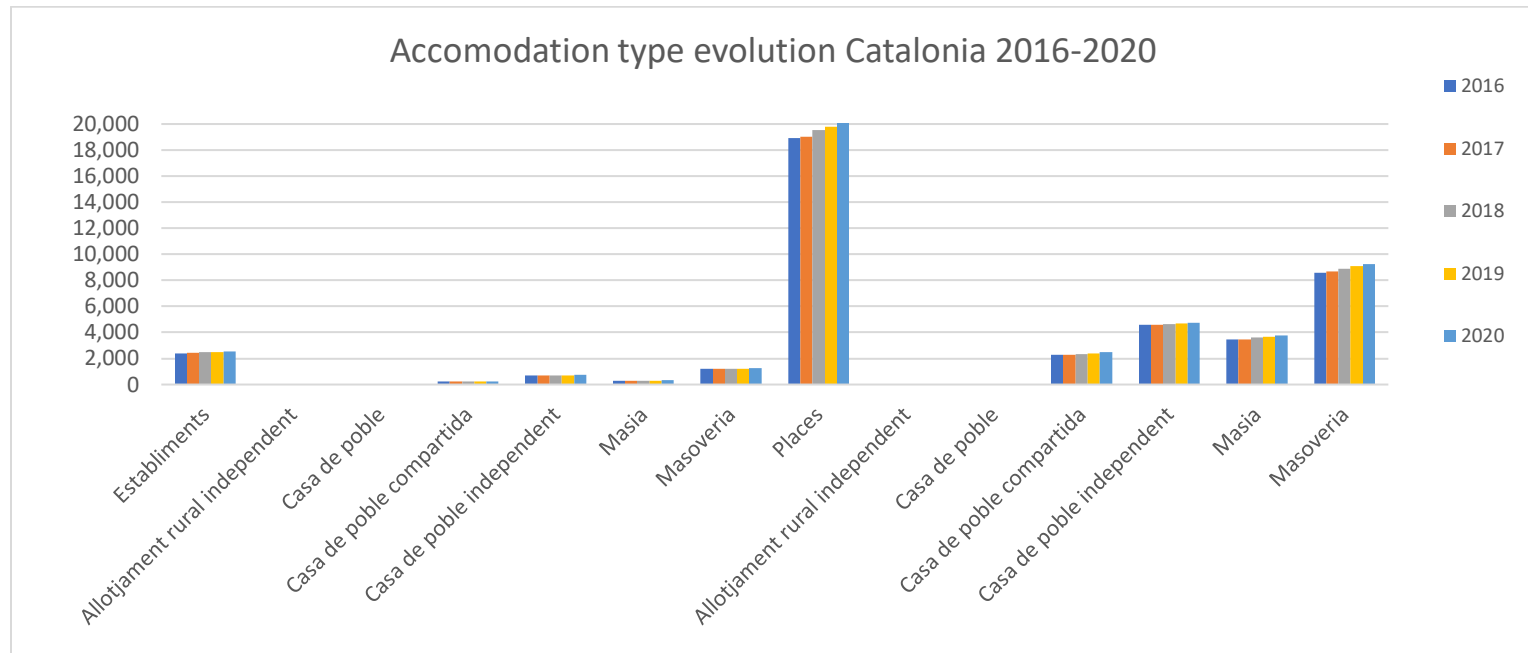
Figure 11 shows the RT overnights distribution by tourism brand, in line with the previous results. It is clear that RT is still consider a complementary tourism to the 3S tourism looking at the Costa Brava, and of the mountain tourism looking at the Pyrenees. Few are the overnight for RT in Costa Dorada, and lower the ones in Lleida province.

Figure 12 Rural Tourism overnights 2018-2021. Source Idescat 2021



As figure 12 shows, in Spring 2019 there was a pick of national and later Summer also of international arrivals for RT, while the Catalan market was stable. At the begging of 2020, there was clearly a general drop of the market and lack of data. Only at the end of 2020, there was slow recover, while overnights show an important growth in 2021 of the total overnights.

Figure 13 Accommodation types evolution Catalonia 2016-2020. Own elaboration. Source Idescat 2021



In figure 13, accommodation type evolution shows the rise of bed places in *masoverias*², and in *casa de poble*, in both sharing and private versions, in the last years with a pick in 2020. Also, the slight establishments increase, while a constant increase of beds number. Considering the recent decree, decree 75/2020, in 2020, the rise of REs number might be more significant.

² The “masoveria” is an old housing system according to which the owner of a farm granted the right to live on his property to a person or family in exchange for working the land and giving him a percentage of the harvest and / or livestock. In Catalonia much was practiced between the s. X- XV.

While Figures 14 and 15 respectively show the average RT stay in Spain and Catalonia starting from the most recent period, the second quarter 2021 (only May and June 2021 were available). The picks on second quarters since 2016 demonstrating the still high seasonality. In the first quarter of 2020, in both graphics, the average stay has dropped due to Covid-19, while the second quarter 2020 and the first part of the second quarter 2021 cover the highest rank of the average stay at the national and Catalan level.

Figure 14 The average stay in Spain per quarter for 2016-2021. Own elaboration. Source Idescat 2021

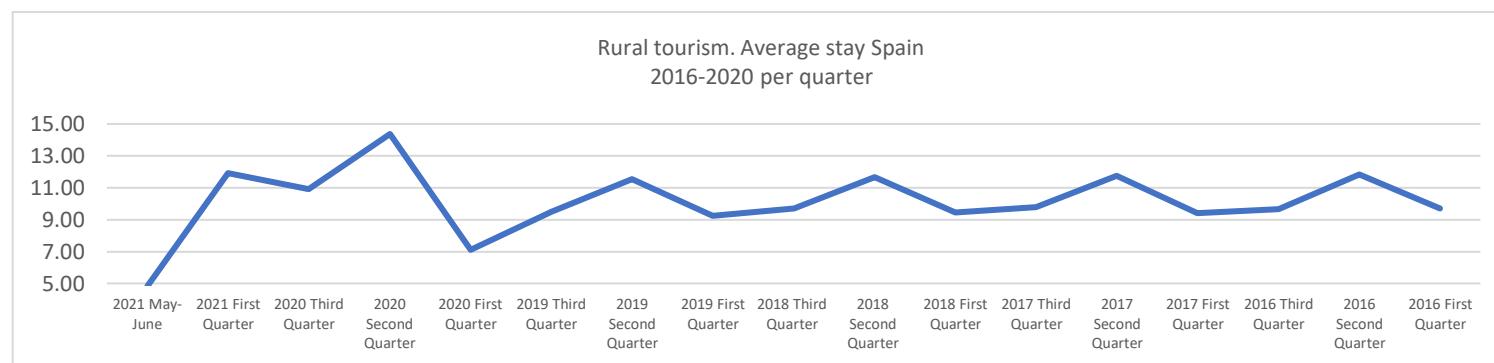


Figure 15 Average stay in Catalonia per quarter for 2016-2021. Own elaboration. Source Idescat 2021



2.4 Cooperativism in rural and agro-food tourism: advantages and European benchmarks

In the European rural areas, agricultural cooperativism has become an absorbing formula to relaunch agri-food activities, supporting the traditional agriculture activities and products and enhancing the gastrotourism. As the same time, it stimulates the progressive formation of professionals of the sector and the opening of new SMEs activities supported by the cooperative networking that allows them to compete with commercial operators, achieving values that are difficult to achieve individually (Ciruela, 2003). Agro-cooperatives can be considered a lateral coordinated network (Robbins & Barnwell), where the loose organization form foresees in wide participation of the member in the decision-making process.

In increasingly globalized and competitive markets, cooperation is presented as a critical formula for the agricultural entrepreneur, especially for SM farms that otherwise would not be able to compete on the market, while through smart collaboration and networking, they can improve and develop their activity, and consequently, reach a greater dimension and advantages in economic, productive, commercial and social aspects (Menguzzato, 1992).

Agrarian cooperative could develop tourist activities by optimizing and diversifying its resources, adding RT to their traditional productive segments as important complementary activities in terms of incomes and visibility. In this way, the existing organizational structures can increase efficiency and offer better services to partners and clients thanks to higher supplement incomes. The agricultural activity presents a series of circumstances like price variability, limited domestic consumption, difficulty in accessing international markets, fluctuations in production, etc.), that can badly influence the outcomes, especially at the monetary level. The linkage agriculture-tourism (Gascón, 2012) can facilitate complementary income and prevent a progressive abandonment of farms.

Agricultural cooperativism can be a tool to promote powerful synergy between local actors, to reach the competitiveness and efficiency business' objectives, and the development and satisfaction of social needs (Igual, 2002). The integration of tourism into cooperatives would stimulate the active participation of local populations and optimize the use of resources, which is very important in the most depressed areas. In addition, the combined management integrated cooperative and tourist activity can reduce the fixed management cost, while, on the other hand, it can create an added-value to both activities, increasing the level of services' attractiveness not only for the client but also for the partner-owner of the houses (purchase of equipment, cleaning, maintenance, common services, advice, etc.). This linkage might also prevent investors from leading RT from outside the area and generating endogenous development processes reviving the interest of locals, especially young people (Igual, 2020). In this case, local institutions play a key role in promoting these

dynamics through flexible and supportive policies.

History of cooperativism in Catalonia

At the end of the XIX century, the agriculture sector modernization provoked the need for formation, experimentation, and technique education. The first decades of the XX century were critical for the agriculture sector in southern Europe due to low prices and rising production costs for the farmers. The creation of cooperatives was a response of local landowners and farmers to the threats caused by cheap imports and the destruction of vines by phylloxera.

In Spain, for many years, the agricultural cooperative movement remained weak compared to other European countries (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Switzerland, and Italy). In the Italian and France examples, (wineries) cooperatives were already settled before the Spanish Civil War in 1936, when Spain experienced the first winemaking cooperatives (around 100).

Catalonia was an exception inspired by the proximity with the winemaking cooperatives of French Midi. In the early XX century, Catalonia counted already with a dense network of associations - more than 80 wine cooperatives - facilitating cooperation in rural areas, especially in Tarragona province in the Priorat region - 70% of the Catalan cooperative -, with the appearance and diffusion of winery cooperatives due to a competitive regional party politics.

In 1912, the first cooperative was the Wine Union of the Lower Priory of Marçà, and one year later, the first joint harvest was made.

In 1914, the “Mancomunitat de Catalunya” was organized, a single administrative unit to regroup the representatives of the four Catalan provinces. In 1919, the Mancomunitat created the “Acció Social Agrària”, a section of the Technical service of Agriculture to promote agricultural syndicalism with technical and economic character. The movement leader was Josep M. Rendé, who defined the cooperative model as an association of all farmers of each village in an agricultural union that would federate at comarcal and national level. They were vertical unions whose objectives were buying and selling, processing products, and agricultural credit.

At the beginning of 1931, there was the creation of the Unió de Sindicatos Agrícolas de Cataluña. Between 1930 - 1935 there was a phase of the cooperative wineries' construction, with the installation of the Priorat Agricultural Federation (Santos, 2018).

The Mancumunitat looked for the social stability of the field by creating economically viable unions that contributed to modernizing agriculture. The cooperative movement culminated with the creation, by the republican Generalitat, of the Federation of Agricultural Unions of Catalonia (FESAC), in 1936, when the Rendé's model was finally applied. With the escalation of radical peasant trade unionism during the Civil War, some cooperative oil factories were confiscated as collectivization experiences.

The Franco regime annihilated the basic principles of cooperativism with the Cooperatives Act of 1942, which banned and reduced them to mere welfare entities, creating the Union of Cooperatives of the Field (UTECA).

Catalonia Generalitat settled up the Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives of Catalonia in 1981, and two years later, it approved the Cooperatives Act in 1983 with the goal of the revival of a democratic and national movement, which coincided with the birth of a century-old cooperative model and the profound sector reconversion (Museo-Cooperativa del Oli, La Granadella).

An important example is the winery cooperative in the Priorat region, traditionally specialized in viticulture and with strong associative roots. In recent decades, significant transformations in the wine sector have led the Priorat brand to be associated with high-quality wines and well-known internationally. The cooperativism represented a radical change to its economic decline during the 20th century and responded to a dual purpose, first the joint elaboration to reduce production costs and to benefit from the emergence of economies of scale, with the advantage of reducing employ labor at the time of harvest, and second to increase product quality and obtained greater bargaining power in the market (Cabré, 2018).

In Spain, agriculture converted from a self-consumption to an extensive specialized one, mainly for raw materials destined for the export.

In recent years, there was a boom in the production of high-quality products with ecologic and quality assurance labels (DOC) for their relevance to the exportation market. The production's specialization has facilitated the cooperativism and dynamize SMEs' environment encouraging the sector professionalization, especially for young people, and the transformation towards the agro-industrial transformation (Cànoves, 2006).

Some cooperatives that count with a seasonal production, such as oil companies in Catalonia, understood the benefits of coping RT with their main activities ensuring major incomes. In addition, oil production, thanks to its operation, tradition, and, of course, its product, can represent an important tourist attraction.

European Cooperativism and bench market

Nowadays, in Europe, there are about 250.000 cooperatives, with more than 163 million members. They are widespread along with the countries and the sectors (agriculture, banking, industry). In recent years, they have complimented the original business sector with new service activities, like social service, tourism, education, transport, and finance for SMEs. Approximately 40.000 cooperatives operate in the food sector, with a turnover of 300.000€ and a workforce of 660.000 employees (Begalli, 2015).

Since the XIX, the cooperativism movement start revive the industrial and farm sectors. The first cooperative in the modern sense was the Rochdale Pioneers Society, founded in the UK in 1844 by

28 textile workers and artisans associated with opening a cooperative store where even the poorest could buy the basic necessities. The idea was to put their forces together to achieve purchasing power of their meager wages, and any profits from the retailer could have been used to create new jobs for struggling members. The initiative was successful and enhanced the creation of other cooperatives in the whole Europe.

Its most important merit was to establish in their statute the fundamental principles that still inspire the entire cooperative movement, like the sharing of values and interests among members, internal democracy ("a head, a vote"), religious tolerance, the education right, equality (and women rights), solidarity.

Since the Rochdale P. Society, two different organizational models developed in Europe: the Northern model applied in Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands, that since the 1960s allowed the agricultural cooperative to adapt to eco-social changes thanks to the liberal tradition and flexibility of legal rules.

The Southern model, applied in France, Italy, and Spain, has been aided by government interventions, offering financial support, tax incentive, and a legal framework, more complex and criticized.

The Italian case

In Italy the first cooperative was launched in 1849 in Turin.

Since 1870 the prevalent philosophy on the cooperativism movement was the catholic one, and cooperatives represent a tool for eco-social emancipation. After almost a century of intense development of cooperativism in Italy, the Fascist period started in 1922 generated the closure of the majority of cooperatives. 1942 was a significant moment with the approbation of the Civil Code, where cooperative societies were recognized and regulated (Fratini, 2017).

The flourishing of Cooperative Centrals characterized the last part of XX. Italian cooperatives have adopted a modern perspective since the 1990s, with relevant regulatory changes.

The case of Italy represents a relevant example of a mix between the traditional and modern managerial approaches, with different levels of autonomy of the cooperatives from the members. Italian cooperatives also have a social dimension as they play a relevant role in valorizing the local production systems, especially in rural areas (Begalli, 2015).

Capone (2008), looking at the agro-industrial situation in Italy, confirms the high cooperatives and collaborations between SMEs number. He proposes the local creative system(LCS) concept as a socio-territorial entity characterized by the high concentration of creative industries and specific features and identities that facilitate the generation and diffusion of creativity.

In Italy, Tuscany can be considered a LCS characterized by the large endowment of cultural, artistic, and environmental heritage and by a network of economic, non-economic, and institutional actors specialized in agro-tourism and tourism activities often linked with agro cooperatives

(Capone, F. 2006). Tuscany based its success, at the economic and tourist level, on clusterized tourist filière made up of SMEs linked in tight networks where there are successfully competing with great results (Capone 2008).

This phenomenon has been also supported by the strong presence of agrotourism in the region, activity recognized in 1985 by the regional law launched in Tuscany, the first at national and European level committed to the development of rural areas (Randelli, 2014).

Besides its environmental and socio-cultural heritage, Tuscany's tourism success increased thanks to rural tourism, which introduced a change for the region, passing from an agricultural vocation to a touristic one to support the development of rural areas. Often agro-cooperatives includes tourist activities or collaborate with local agrotourism or rural accommodations, especially wineries and oil cooperatives, which complement the farming incomes with the tourist ones.

In addition, traditional and typical foods represent a crucial factor in the Mediterranean diet (MD) promoted by Italy. The traditional food production processes have been valorized as social and cultural values to preserve diversity and collective identity, become a key element of tourist flows in Italy, and reference socio-cultural practices, festivities, celebrations, memberships, sharing, conviviality and well-being care.

2.5 Current opportunities and challenges for rural tourism after COVID-19

The COVID-19 disease, caused by a coronavirus originating in Wuhan (China), has spread across five continents, starting from China and Europe, Us and then quickly all the others, infecting not only people but also markets. It arrived in Spain and the Balearic Islands between February and early March of 2020.

COVID-19 and the subsequent socio-economic crisis have caused a radical decrease in tourism demand. The closure of air access to destinations and the ending of local companies and businesses have derived socio-economic impacts, which affect individuals and families and represent elements of acquired vulnerability in the medium term (Aledo and at., 2020).

In the last two years, rural destinations have emerged as one of the most appealing choices after the pandemic. Indeed, rural areas represent a great alternative from urban and mass tourism destinations, and they offer many activities in open-air for those who want to maintain a social distance. As a result, the loss of tourism business in the more rural regions of Spain has been much lower than in more traditional coastal and urban destinations (Caixa, 2021).

International action post-Covid19

The UNWTO estimates that global tourist mobility in 2020 dropped 70-80% overall due to the lockdown and that the COVID-19 crisis could have potentially eliminated around 50 million tourism jobs worldwide, which means about a loss of hundreds of billions of euros to tourism operators and workers (Fletcher, 2020).

Last 2020, the UNWTO Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili, said "This crisis is an opportunity to rethink the tourism sector and its contribution to the people and planet; an opportunity to build back better towards a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism sector that ensure the benefits of tourism are enjoyed widely and fairly."

The UNWTO World tourism barometer, updated last July 2021, shows as a consequence of the travel restrictions imposed during the coronavirus pandemic, international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) dropped by 85% in January-May 2021 compared to the same period of the pre-pandemic year 2019, or 65% over 2020 (see Table 3). In number, the loss is of some 147 million international arrivals compared to the same five months of 2020, which has represented the worst year on record for international tourism with an unprecedented drop of 73%.

Table 3 International overnight drop by Continents (%) 2020-2019.

Owned elaboration. Source UNTWO (2021)

International overnight visitors drop (%) by regions in the first five months of 2021 over the same period in 2019				
Europe	Americas	Asia and Pacific	Middle East	Africa
-85%	-72%	-95%	-83%	-81%

Destinations continued to report very weak revenues in the first five months of 2021, ranging from 50% to 90% declines compared to 2019.

International travel is slowly recuperating thanks to the ongoing Covid vaccination and mitigation of mobility restrictions. The domestic market is still driving the recovery of tourism in several destinations, especially those with large domestic demand like the European countries.

European Union

Another relevant organization's action studied to pursue the objectives of this work, is the European Commission for its action to recovery from Covid-19 pandemic and to directly support the development of the rural areas.

The EU has launched the NextGenerationEU (NGEU), the temporary instrument designed to boost the recovery, the largest stimulus package ever financed in the continent. It is a once-in-a-lifetime

chance for EU Countries to emerge stronger from the pandemic through a transformation of economies, getting greener, more digital, and more resilient and at the same time creating opportunities and jobs. The total amount of this investment is €806.9 billion, as means a total of €2.018 trillion in current prices to help rebuild a post-COVID-19 Europe.

The table 4 resume the key elements that this recovery plan aims to include.

Table 4 Next Generation key elements. Own elaboration. EU Commission website.

NEXTGenerationEU elements					
research and innovation, via Horizon Europe	fair climate and digital transitions, via the Just Transition Fund and the Digital Europe Programme	preparedness, recovery and resilience, via the Recovery and Resilience Facility, rescEU and a new health programme, EU4Health	modernising traditional policies such as cohesion and the common agricultural policy, to maximise their contribution to the Union's priorities	fighting climate change, with 30% of the EU funds, the highest share ever of the European budget	biodiversity protection and gender equality

This recovery project includes two main parts:

- The Recovery and Resilience Facility counts €723.8 billion in loans and grants to support reforms and investments in each European Country. The aim is to mitigate the socio-economic pandemic's impacts and make European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient, and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions.
- Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU), which includes €50.6 billion and it is a new initiative that continues and extends the crisis response and repair measures delivered through the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative and the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus. The funds will be made available to
 - the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
 - the European Social Fund (ESF)
 - the European Fund for Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)

These additional funds will be provided in 2021-2022.

NextGenerationEU will also bring additional money to other European programs or funds like Horizon2020, InvestEU, and rural development between others.

Any type of actor can apply for funding proposals, get background information on funding processes and programs.

National context

The pandemic has also shown the vulnerabilities of an economy tied to tourism, which constitute higher than average proportions of GDP and employment. For example, in Spain and Italy where industries typically comprise many SMEs, often family-owned businesses.

As it happened in previous crises, national tourism has been a critical factor for the survival of tourism in Spain, which also counts with an important number of second houses, especially in residential tourism municipalities.

The pandemic impact on rural and inland tourism has been more moderate than in other types of tourism, such as the 3S at the international level. In 2020 rural tourism performed better than the rest of the sector, increasing its share to 14%, and in 2021 it still represents a driving force of the recovery gaining in importance (Caixa research, 2020)³.

The European Network for Rural Development, established in 2008, aims to help Member States implement their Rural Development Programs, representing a platform for sharing ideas and experiences on rural development policies. Its members include national rural networks (NRNs), as the Spanish Red Rural Nacional (RRN) managing authorities of Member States, representatives of local action groups (GALs), and rural development organizations. These actors have reinforced their actions in the rural areas to help to recover from the pandemic.

In Spain, rural development management is decentralized by the country's autonomous communities through 17 rural development programs (PDR), financed through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (FEADER), and national contributions. After Covid-19, the PDR has reviewed strategies and priority measures to be adopted to respond to the needs of each specific geographical area.

The Spanish plan to recovery from the pandemic, presenter for the new European funds, includes a set of mutually reinforcing reforms and investments to activate measures in the areas of employment to reduce labour market segmentation and enhance active labour market policies, as the rural areas. It also counts measures in the area of education and skills, as well as social policies. Furthermore, Spain's plan includes €6.1 billion to invest in clean technologies and accelerate the development and use of renewables, and €7.8 billion to improve public and private buildings' energy efficiency and promote sustainable mobility.

³ Rural tourism as a response to COVID-19

<https://www.caixabankresearch.com/en/sector-analysis/tourism/rural-tourism-response-covid-19>

Catalonia

In the Plan for the rectification of the Tourism sector in Catalonia after Covid press conference, the Minister of Business and Knowledge has explained that Covid-19 pointed out the value of the tourism sector in Catalonia, especially international tourism, after a record of growth in 2017 and 2018. Tourism is fundamental in terms of hospitality and for undirect businesses and the real estate industry. The tourism sector represents almost 13-14% of the Catalan PIB. Its impact goes over this percentage, as in the case of foreign investment and mobility.

Thanks to tourism, airports added many connections, allowing MICE arrivals, goods, international students, and medical interests. For example, Barcelona's airport duplicates between 2017 and 2019 its passengers from 27.000 to 54.000, positioning itself as the third hub in Europe for direct connections between other European destinations.

Tourism was the key sector for the recovery from the financial crisis of 2013.

In 2019 international arrivals number was 20.000 generating an income of 20.000€, while in 2020, the international arrivals dropped to 3.8 million with a generated revenue of 3.6million€. The arrivals were mainly by car from proximity market as other RAs and France.

The drop caused by Covid-19 is the biggest since the 1950 when Catalonia and Spain opened to international tourism.

The Generalitat counts on spending 5.6million€ for the tourism recovery, pursuing the goals to recuperate almost the 50% of the tourist income, which means between 11 and 13 millions€ in terms of tourist spending thanks to the diversification of the tourism offers. It means trying to redistribute the tourism flows from mass tourism destinations, as Barcelona city and the Catalan coastline to new more internal destinations. It can be possible thanks to new tourist experiences in more rural areas counting with open-air activities in the natural environment and new experiential products such as gastronomy, active, and adventure tourism, in line with the new need for the demand.

The B-Travel2021 in Barcelona (visited with Alba sud) has confirmed the solid propension for the domestic demand. The majority of the Catalan comarcas stands offers gastronomic and eno-touristic experiences, with a strong promotion of the winery's region of Priorat and the gastronomic area of Terre del'Ebre. Also, active tourism (senderisme) in natural spaces around Catalunya was strongly promoted with a predominance of Pyrenees, Val d'Aran, and natural spaces in Barcelona's metropolitan areas.

To recover, the RRN Catalan Observatory, launched in 2019, aims to reunite the SMEs efforts creating networks and support the RT offer in Catalonia and the good-practices sharing. Also, to encourage the GALs to give a new boost to their actions and impacts on the territories, promoting the NextGeneration funds application.

On the other hand, it has created a calendar of activities to stimulate the youth implication in the agro-industry. Indeed several activities and open-day or formation courses have been launched to advance the formation and employment of young people and women, still as weak points. It has also increased Social Media promotion as a tool to make diffusion, networking, and stimulation of the local RT actors' involvement to join efforts to recover from Covid-19 (RNN Catalan observatory representative interview).

2.6 Identification of a research gap - SWOT analysis

The following SWOT highlights the critical factors for RT development in Catalonia (see Figure 17) emerging from the literature review.

Starting with the strengths, RT diversifies local economy, being tourism and agriculture considered complementary activities that can mutually contrast their seasonality. The agriculture process and products constitute attractive elements for the rural tourists, who choose to visit farms and taste the local products (Gascón 2018), including gastro tourism/ eno tourism/ oil tourism activities.

The unique natural, cultural, and landscape heritage includes the territory identity, which is the base for rural tourism, representing the extra income for the LC and improving the QL. RT generates endogenous local development of the rural area and extra income for the LC that is happily open to RT for its benefits and depopulation action.

Another strength of RT is the stimulation towards the preservation, conservation, and revitalization of natural and cultural resources as <tourism capital>, reducing the abandon of the areas and the agro-industrial activities, even though this is still a strong phenomenon in the whole Spain and Catalan internal regions.

Catalan rural area has a successful experience in the EU grants management (Leaders, Proder). It can now count on the recent NEXTGeneration for rural development post-Covid, representing an unique opportunity for rural socio-economic development and the professionalization of RT.

The lack of cooperativism is a weakness, which can be converted into an opportunity for the RT if well managed. The support of RRN, GALs and local institutions represents a significant opportunity to increase networking and cooperativism, which can mean higher benefits and cost reduction for the SMEs within the territory. In IT and marketing innovation, rural destinations can find a significant opportunity to attract a higher demand consolidating their positions on the market to compete with coastal destinations, already saturated. This innovation can also help with the sensibilization of preservation and conservation of natural and cultural resources, which are their attractiveness basis (Briassoulis, 2002).

The interest of public actors and the possibility of new policies through participatory processes is a massive opportunity that the local stakeholders should seek to provoke a meaningful improvement of the Catalan RT structure towards a renewed alternative tourism model.

The pandemic opens ample opportunities in terms of new tourist demand' needs of activities in open-air, far from congestion areas, together with an increase of sensibility towards ecology and healthier food and lifestyle; climate change worry and mobility restrictions that stimulate the domestic tourism. The support of SDGs Agenda 2030 (UNTWO) and EU projects as SmarVillages means the possibility of infrastructure and QL improvement that can attract a higher tourist demand.

On the negative side, weaknesses and threats regard mainly the supply heterogeneity, resulting in a low quality of RT accommodation and services, accompanied by a lack of professionalism formation opportunities (Canoves, 2004). These characteristics result in a limited RT demand, which faces a scarce international demand, and condemn it in a lock-in situation of low competitiveness and unsustainability. In this sense, the lack of cooperativism between the local SMEs is a deficiency that creates a low benefits distribution within the local community.

A relevant weakness is a lack of homogenous planning and managing plans and sector regulation, with scarce quality control and homologation interests. It would be fundamental to generate a high-quality product and ensure sustainability in the long term (Russo, 2002). Otherwise, the risk for RT is to get stuck as an undeveloped tourism typologist, resulting in just a different product of the sun&beach coastal tourism without achieving the goal of redistributing the tourism flow (Ibarra, 2006). Unlike the Italian case, where agro-rural tourism represents an important sector with a specialized and professional supply and a constant tourist demand at the national, international level (Randelli, 2014).

On the other side, the threat is an unsustainable development towards the overuse of the natural resources and compromising the authenticity of the local culture, with consequent loss of attractiveness. The touristification of the agricultural areas can also generate inflation and price increases with social issues as gentrification or alteration of the social balance of the community (Capone, 2006)

At the socio-economical level, the lack of restrictive regulation and public interventions towards creating a tax system that exacerbates the land (and resources) use, establishing quotas, or licenses among the supply agents can generate a negative RT model establishment.

Table 5 SWOT Analysis of RT in Catalonia. Own elaboration

STRENGTHS

- Provides complementary income to family economies;
- enhances of agricultural activity and landscape mosaics maintenance;
 - diversity of agriculture, landscape and environmental;
- strong linkage agriculture - food (gastronomy) - tourism;
- natural resources, strong territorial identity and <<cultural capital>> as base for the rural development;
- Experience in development initiative like LEADER, PRODER between others;
 - innovative activities
 - Generates new jobs;
- old buildings reuses and construction overcrowding reduction;
 - stable and unseasonal domestic demand;

WEAKNESSES

- limited RT % on the general tourism demand;
 - undeveloped international demand;
- lack of professionalism, formation opportunities in the sector;
 - lack of regulation of the sector (pollution, activities);
- lack of homogenous planning and managing plans (in vertical level);
 - lack of quality control and homologation;
- lack of young residents engaged with the territories and local SME;
 - lack of cooperativism
- It is a seasonal activity and needs the complement of other rents
 - inequality in gender job positions;
- socio-environmental impacts that damage the attractiveness/competitiveness/sustainability

SWOT

OPPORTUNITIES

- cooperativism in agriculture and tourism;
 - RRN and GALs networking support;
 - New European funds;
- over-tourism/saturation in coastal destinations;
- public authorities interest in RT development;
- new trends and tourist demand' needs post-Covid19;
 - IT and marketing innovation;
- increasing sensibility towards ecology and healthier food and lifestyle;
- new demands for services for the community and infrastructure maintenance.
- livestock, forestry and hunting as complementary activities and potential RT products;
 - cheaper land, flexible labor and tax advantages;
 - (voluntary) categorization by spikes (1-5);
 - less seasonal type of tourism;

THREATS

- agricultural and land abandon;
- the integration of foreigners, disintegration of community cohesion and identity lost;
 - tourism substitution of traditional activities;
- inflation and price increases in the community and in the market housing;
 - unbalance distribution of the benefits in the community;
 - artificialization the local culture and lost of attractiveness;
 - alteration of the social balance of the community
 - social issue (gentrification and feelings of rejection);
- degradation of fauna and flora due to the massive use of pesticides;
 - Outside investments introduction in the community

3 Methodology

3.1 RQs in the light of the literature, RP sources, data, techniques of analysis used

The pre-selected research questions that have guided the development of this work, with the consequential identification of the literature, and the required material to generate new knowledge to answer them, have encountered two main problems:

1) In recent years, Spain and Catalonia have made relevant efforts towards rural area development, also thanks to the crucial European funds (mainly Leaders, Feders, etc.) that have been successfully used. Unfortunately, the problem of internal land abandonment is still in its peak. Rural tourism has been launched as a tool to contrast the depopulation phenomenon and to support the agriculture sector through a revalorization of the agriculture process, and food patrimonialization, in order to generate extra incomes for the farmers. Unfortunately, it has not yet produced the long-awaited positive impacts on the socio-economic framework of the rural areas. Indeed, Spain and the Catalan AR are still identified as a mass-tourism destination of mainly sun & beach tourism, due to the low prices and antiquated infrastructures, especially along the Mediterranean coast. Rural tourism is still considered a low-quality product characterized by a strong heterogeneity, and lacking both in high-quality product and professionalism.

Furthermore, this research question takes into account the identification of innovative forms, like cooperativism, as a strategic response to enhance the community benefits of the rural economy and make it more resilient, starting from the acknowledgment - acquired thanks to the literature review and the internship work - that in Spain, much as in Catalonia, these forms of enterprise (cooperatives in rural or agro-tourism) are not well developed yet. In this sense, as studied throughout the Master's course, an exception is represented by eno-tourism that has been analyzed as a counter-example to underpin the strength of cooperativism, and in

general, of the joint effort to resolve the problem of the land and traditional activity abandonment.

2) The RT model has experienced a radical change in recent years, but it did not generate a critical change in the Catalan tourism model. This second research question looks at the identification of an 'opportunity gap' in the current crisis caused by Covid-19 pandemic, which has promoted proximity tourism in less crowded areas (as confirmed by the literature, and in the majority of the media pieces) in favor of the rural and internal ones that offer many open-air activities in contact with natural spaces. As an individual body, they are not able to generate critical impact for socio-economic improvement. However, by joining their efforts thanks to cooperativism, they can have a powerful influence on the market and obtain more benefits to be redistributed on the LC.

Also, public actors such as GALs and municipalities have been identified as promoters of rural (tourism) development initiatives and are experts in applying and managing the European funds.

As a case study, I have highlighted some of the best practices and analysed financial aid opportunities (Leaders, Proder, NextGeneration), alongside legal instruments at the regional and European level, as tools to support the recovery from the pandemic and for a further improvement of the rural area socio-economic situation.

The methodology has been based on a triangulation method.

A deep investigation of secondary sources - available on the online platform SABIDI and Google scholar, and websites linked to the R, such as the ones of public institutions and private tourism stakeholders - to set the research objectives, and identify the information that helped to justify the relevance of the hypothesis. The second sources include qualitative and quantitative data for a better overview of RT evolution and Covid impacts.

As first sources, new knowledge has been produced thanks to the school-trip in Priorat, interviewing relevant RT stakeholders, and fieldwork development.

Below is a detailed explanation of the research problem sources, data, and techniques of analysis used.

Quantitative sources

As quantitative data, information from UNWTO, EU, INES.es, Idecat.cat has been analyzed and settled for a clear comprehension of the rural tourism structure. Also, Spanish and Catalan webpages of public institutions and tourism plans have been examined, with a reorganization of their statistical data in order to better visualize the supply organization through graphics (histograms, bars, pies, etc), and used as statistical basis as support, see Figure 9-16. The data confirmed the constant increase of RT % on the tourism activity amount in Catalonia, looking at the period 2016-2021. On the other hand, it shows heterogeneity and low quality, recognized as an intense weakness.

Some figures and maps have been used, like Fig. 4, and Fig.18, to visualize the RE and bed distributions. Two maps have been created using Instamap.cat to understand the RT establishment distribution in the Catalan territory and visualize their concentration.

A table has been made to show the drop in tourism due to the Covid-19, accompanied by a study of the European funds proposed as recovery aids.

Qualitative sources

The qualitative data include an extensive analysis of secondary sources for the literature's development mainly. Audiovisual material, consultation with (rural) tourism stakeholders by mailing, messages, calls, video interviews, and in-deep interview thanks to a field work, allow the generation of new knowledge as first sources.

The literature review has included authors such as Gemma V. Cànoves, who wrote several texts on RT, its evolution and weaknesses in Catalonia, as in Grande Ibarra. Also, Alba Sud collaborators such as Murray and Gascón, amongst others, and together with readings and debate on RT with Ernest Cañada, Alba Sud founder and expert on the topic, have guided this work's development, adding a critical element.

I have applied the TALC and EEG models to understand the development level of rural tourism in Europe and Spain to accompany the literature review. The TALC model has also been used later on to analyze the RT by Catalan provinces.

Also, publications on different online newspapers and websites, such as the one of Alba Sud, have been used as a starting point for research question generation. In addition, during the internship, I took part in several formation courses linked to RT, like “Tourism in natural spaces, and climate change” and “Proximity tourism”, guided by experts and with time to debate and construct a critical opinion on the topics, with rural tourism amongst these. Academic journals have also been analyzed, such as JCR tourism leisure and hospitality. For example, the ones on agro(tourism) cooperativism allowed comprehension of this movement's evolution in Spain, Catalonia, and at the European level, focusing on the Italian example, studying papers of Randelli and Capone.

Also, tourism and leisure online journals as Hosteltur, and L'Avanguardia, have been taken into account to be updated on the more recent development of the industry, such as tourist trends, new decrees and changes in the administrative bodies, such is the case of the new director of the Barcelona Turisme.

A multitude of decrees, industry reports, also European, national, and regional reports have been studied, together with the review of official websites of Eu-Commission and European funds' projects websites, to investigate the Covid-19 impacts on the tourism industry.

Also, the analysis of papers like Fletcher and Freya Higgins-Desbiolles (among the more active in Europe in writing about this “new” topic) helped analyze the COVID-19 impacts on tourism and the possible challenges and opportunities for RT.

Finally, a SWOT analysis has also been done to highlight the relevant factors that sustain the research objectives looking at the RT development pre and post Covid-19.

Case-study applied methodology

Several research methods have been used to develop the case-study. Firstly, the review of papers and Catalan websites on tourism, such as the Agència Catalana de Turisme, Generalitat de Catalunya, and special attention to tourism industry reports and PA plans referring to the period 2009-2021. Secondly, some maps have been created - applying cartography techniques - to enhance the Catalan RT accommodation distribution between the administrative provinces. Thanks to Instamap.cat, I have made a heatmap to visualize the concentration of the REs in Catalonia that shows a low presence in the Lleida province.

A table to visually comprehend the rural accommodation categorization has been developed from the Official Establishment guide, available on the Department of Business and Labor webpage. A TALC model has been applied to highlight the different phases of development of RT between the Catalan model, and as a base from which to choose (4) case studies that exemplify it. I have also used audiovisual material as the press conference on the "Plan for the rectification of the Tourism sector" in Catalonia, the press conference of the RRN on SMEs active in RT, and good practices in AR. This content helped me understand the actual tourism situation in Catalonia and how the stakeholders perceive this industry, and which new tourism movements have been launched in the last two years when the pandemic already had affected these sectors.

Due to the pandemic situation and to the (short) timing of this work development (tourism high season), the majority of contacts and interviews have been telematic, facilitated by tools like Teams, Google Meet, mailing, WhatsApp or the classic phone call.

As decided in the tutorials, after attending an ethnography course, different types of contacts and interviews have been conducted to get the qualitative first sources, and collect the needed information that confirmed the status of this work statement. For example, email exchange with some eco-rural tourism actors (like Ecotour.es – Alba Sur collaborator, Associacio Era, etc.), accompanied by some follow-up video meetings with three stakeholders as a cooperative founder in Tarragona province, with the Pireneu Occidental GAL, and with the representative of the RRN local observatory for Catalonia and Balears; all have been useful as the first approach with cooperative and network movements in the region.

The interview with the RRN Catalan representative has been constructive for a broader vision on the RRN' actual duties at the national and AR level, understanding its WOW in rural areas, and as a promoter of projects and networks. In addition, it was profitable in terms of web page suggestions and contact' recommendations.

During the DMOS classes, I have studied the Priorat eno-tourism case, taking part in a school-trip, in April 2021, to visit the winery area. We got the opportunity for a group call interview with the public body representative of tourism promotion, Priorat turisme, and with the representative of Priorat enoturisme, the private association formed by various small and

medium sector enterprises. The RT development in Priorat has been used as an interesting counterexample of the success of agro-cooperativism in Catalonia.

I have also spoken by phone with Fruiturism representative of Aitona municipality, who has explained the brand and the municipality initiative.

In August 2021, three in-depth interviews with RT SMEs were conducted applying several interview techniques: pre-studying of the actor profile, question preparation, recordings, notes, material elaboration, etc. I have chosen these cases based on their juridical organization form (cooperative and rural accommodation), for their location in the internal rural area of the Lleida province, which is the least developed in terms of tourism activity and the furthest from the coast. Also, because they appeared in this work since the first contact. Two of them have been on Google Meet, the first one with Boumort Indomit – recommended by the RRN as a tourism cooperative - and the third one with the Casa Leonardo owner – recommended by RRN and Pireneu Occidental GAL. For the second interview, I went face-to-face with the Municipality assessor to La Granadella. During this fieldwork in the middle of August 2021, I visited the Museu i Centre de la Cultura de l'Oli de Catalunya (MuOC i CCOC), in the same village. These visits have been accompanied by a talk with the representatives and an oil tasting. I have also attended the inauguration of the winning sculptural works at OliverArt. I have organized a self-guided itinerary in the agriculture landscape to test in first person the tourist quality experience in the area.

The materials - see Annex 3, 4, and 5 - have been used to highlight the best practices of RT in Catalonia and verify the alignment of the sector with the Catalan political agenda.

The literature has included material review in different languages (Spanish, Catalan, English and Italian). Some reflections have been elaborated to generalize and interpret this work's results, which aim to contribute to the tourism debate at the international level. Some considerations have been added to support future decisions on rural tourism policy and strategies in Catalonia or, more broadly, for rural tourism management, recognizing the importance of the possible applicability to different tourist areas.

3.2 Analytical framework: key elements to assess the 'success' at company / territorial / community level of rural tourism development initiatives

The literature review has been helpful to address the research objectives and understand the RT evolution and weaknesses, showing the different paths that it has followed depending on the geographical region. An overview of Europe, Spain, and Catalonia's RT historical trajectory has been elaborated using TALC and EEG models that show the distinct phase that North European countries have passed in an earlier time, reaching a consolidation phase since the middle of the XXI. In contrast, in the Mediterranean area, the RT has been more tardive, especially in Spain. In Catalonia, it represents a tool to contrast the abandonment of the agriculture activities and regions.

The agro-cooperativism movement history, at macro and micro geographical levels, has been examined to underpin the development of this phenomenon, as a response to the negative evolution in the more internal regions with a drop of agro-industrial labor and residents. The study of this movement reports how some sectors, such as the exemplified winery one in the Priorat, meant a revival of the local economy in Catalonia, accompanied by the comparison with another Mediterranean country as Italy.

The second source analyzed the COVID-19 impacts on tourism with a significant drop in arrival numbers, especially at the international level, showing, on the other hand, the resilience of the domestic demand. Possible challenges and opportunities for RT have emerged from the examined industry reports and the review of Eu-Commission and European funds' projects official websites, which manifest the critical debate on a new, more sustainable development model for the European rural areas, including the RT as an instrument. Several plans and aids pre and post-Covid have been launched, such as Leader, Proder, to support the development of internal zones. Some of them have been used for the RT evolution, especially for the supply side with a consequently constant increase of RT in the areas - and the most recent NextGeneration funds.

The SWOT analysis highlights the relevant factors that sustain the research objectives - RT as engineer of rural development and enhances the socio-economical traditions – representing a basis for establishing possible future progress and scenarios for tourism in the country, especially in Catalonia. The second and first sources confirm the mediocre outcomes in terms of employment and job opportunities, quality of the RT product, and added-value generated by the RT activity on the LC due to the rural economic structure based on micro-enterprises, especially when not gathered in cooperatives.

The case study, tourism industry reports, and the political agenda plans review have confirmed an increasing interest of the Catalan authorities and actors in the development of interior and active tourism. RT has been considered a tool of re-distributing the tourism flows from the saturated coastline to the rural areas and supporting the development of these last ones at the socio-economic. It can help the re-orientation of the Spanish tourism model into a renewed, more sustainable one long-term and improve quality products.

The rise of good practices in Catalonia and of new tourism movements launched in the last two years, when the pandemic already affected the sectors, has been confirmed thanks to the study of the plan for the rectification of the Tourism sector in Catalonia post-Covid, the political agenda, and from the press-conference of the RRN on SMEs active in RT confirm. The first sources and interviews with tourism actors confirmed the increase of the RT demand at the domestic level. It also emerged the vital role of European funds in the revival of the rural economy, particularly in refurbishing RT accommodation and socio-economic projects from public and private sides. SMEs, city councils have a strong experience in applying and using Leaders aids and, in some cases, in collaboration with the local GAL, as a promoter of local projects.

The sources and date examination explain the choice of focusing on the Lleida province as a rural area destination that is less developed in terms of tourism activity and the further from the coast -, and also for interest that local actors showed interest in this constructive research since the first contact. The three in-depth interviews with RT SMEs, also chosen for their juridical organization form (cooperative and rural accommodation), have supported a broader understanding of the RT offer and reality in a practical sense.

The collected material has confirmed the enthusiasm of the stakeholders in the persecution of the RT product development to improve its quality, and especially to promote a revival of the local economy, with the primary goal of avoiding the depopulation and of supporting the diversification through raising of new sustainable (tourism) economic activity, interpreting tourism as a mean.

4 Case study: Catalonia

RT in Catalonia starts in the 80s. It represented a response to avoid depopulation of the internal areas and to contrast the abandonment of traditional agro-economical activities through their revaluation as cultural heritage in tourism. It was also launched to re-distribute tourism flows from the coast, already mass tourism destinations since the '70 – especially Costa Brava, and from the mountain tourism in the Pyrenees.

Unlike other contexts (like Tuscany), the concept of agrotourism never really worked out, while there was an advance in the rural tourism supply and demand in late XX. Most of the REs were located mainly in the mountain region or more rural areas close to the Costa Brava, so it worked more like a diversification from the classic 3S or mountain tourist product (Jiménez & Prats 2006). Figure 18 and 19 show respectively the rural accommodation distribution in 2004 and 2021. The comparison from the two maps highlights the majority of the RT accommodation is still prevalent in the Pyrenees region and in the Girona province, close to the Costa Brava. A relevant presence is also in the Ebro's territory close to Amposta.

Figure 16 RT accommodation distribution in Catalonia. Cànoves 2004

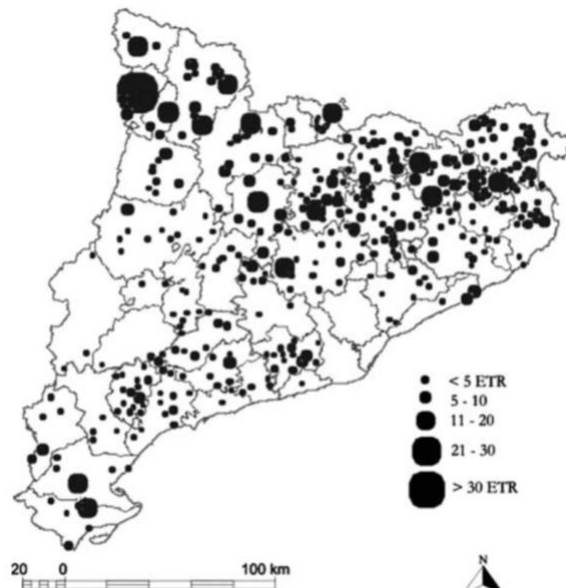
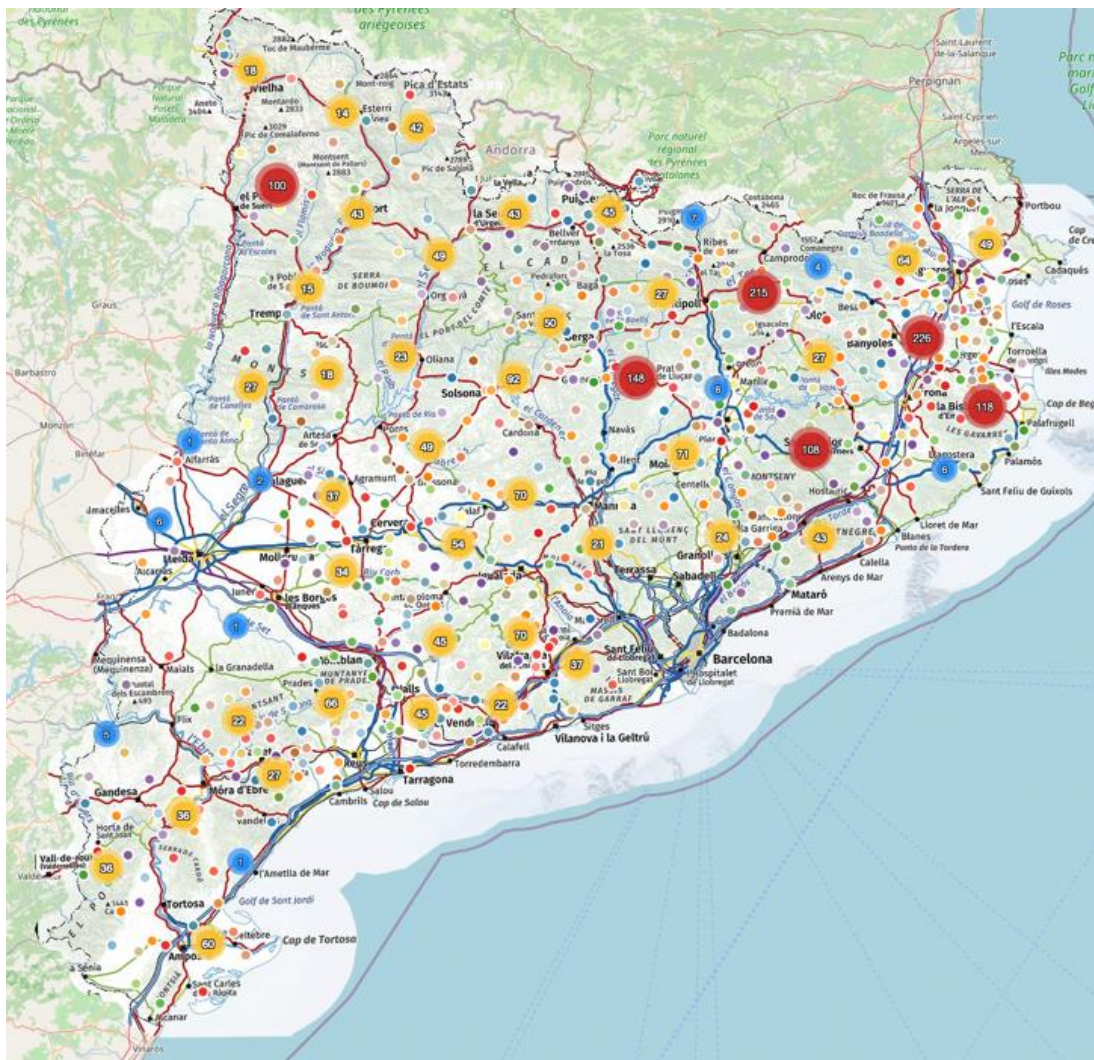


Figure 17 RT accommodation distribution in Catalonia 2021. Own elaboration from Registro de Turismo 2021

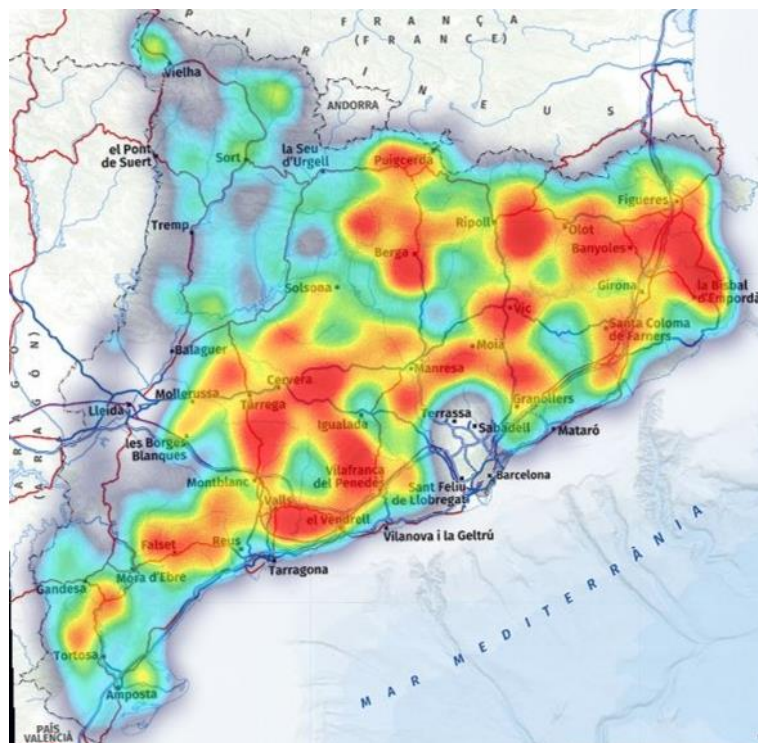


As the heatmap in figure 21 shows, the development in terms of accommodation numbers of RT in the Lleida's province has been irrelevant, especially closer to the border with Aragon AR. In contrast, a substantial rise of RT establishments is notable in Tarragona's province, especially in Alt Camp, Baix Penedés, and Priorat, thanks to the eno-tourism development of the recent years.

In Barcelona province, there has been an increase in rural accommodation close to Manresa and Montserrat, thanks to the beautiful peculiarities of the areas and the proximity to

Barcelona's metropolitan area. The majority of the RT establishment is still in the Girona province, close to pre and Pyrenees areas and coastline (See Annex 2, RE list in Catalonia 2021).

Figure 18 Heatmap of RT accommodation distribution in Catalonia by provinces. Own elaboration from Registro de Turismo (Dep. d'Empresa i Treball.Turisme Generalitat)



4.1 Networks and agents of rural tourism in Catalonia

In terms of RT public actors, the public authorities like the General Directorate of Tourism and the Catalan Tourism Agency (a public-private entity) are fundamental to be named. Then, the Association of Rural Initiatives of Catalonia (ARCA) is the regional network for rural development in Catalonia, and it supports and represents the 12 Catalan Local Action Groups (GALs). The Department is committed to stimulating cooperation between groups and territory

with strategic projects, which have been quite efficient and with good results, such as the Odyssey scholarships for young people from rural areas.

In 2019, the Government began a participatory process to draw up the National Agreement for the 2030 Agenda in Catalonia. ARCA becomes a member of Alliance 2030 and contributes to the SDGs' achievement, together with public and private actors.

In 201, in the occasion of the application of LEADER Participatory Local Development, a total of 11 Local Action Groups (LAGs) (See Annex 1) have been selected in Catalonia with the respective local strategies. They represent 73% of the territory of Catalonia, 10% of the total population, 59% of Catalan municipalities, and an average density in the Leader area of 32.7 inhabitants per km².

The ASETUR – Asociación Española de Casas de Turismo Rural has had a key role in the REs homologation process in Catalonia. In 2008, it launched the voluntary categorization system (see chapter 2.3 RT Catalonia). In coordination with the Catalonia Generalitat, it also supports rural tourism development, undertaking several announcements of selection aids in the last decades.

Another important actor is TURALCAT - RT and Agrotourism Confederation in Catalonia – that promotes and divulgates RT in Catalonia, guaranteeing sustainable development in the rural regions, also focusing on the contribution to the mobility improvement.

Thirteen associated entities form TURALCAT – federations and associations – implied in the promotion of collaborated RT accommodations, intended as well-equipped establishments that offer personalized treatment in a quiet and rural location, installed in a well-restored old building (at least prior to 1950), and offering direct contact with the Catalan rural environment. The SMEs of the RT sectors are fundamentals to be named as they represent the basis of RT structure. These businesses tend to be small family-run activities. Due to their reduced dimension, they cannot generate a critical value with repercussions on rural development for communities in the local and global context (Hall et al., 2005). Also, it demonstrates its sustainable impact on the territory due to its small size and link with local communities, promoting the local economy's diversification. On the other hand, they face difficulties creating good quality packages and efficacy marketing them due to the low tourist market-power and the lack of administration support (Cànoves, 2005). These SMEs also have

difficulty consolidating farmers' lobbies, as demonstrated by the limited numbers of associations and cooperatives in the AR, except the Priorat winery region.

While the RT situation in countries like France, Italy, England, and the Netherlands shows the trend towards a "professionalization of tourism", where most farmers are committed to the quality of the RT sector. In these countries, RT associations at the national and regional level are usual, with clear quality standards, shared goals, and a diversified product aimed at an increasingly demanding and knowledgeable consumer of the sector (Cànoves, 2006).

In light of this consideration, another important actor is the cooperatives at the tourism and agricultural level, and between them is the Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives of Catalonia, formally constituted in 1983. The Federation works to promote the growth and competitiveness of the agri-food cooperative sector, a commitment that has extended to the entire agricultural population (Igual, 2002). In recent years, more affiliate cooperatives have launched gastro-tourism activities to revive the local economy and assure extra income, especially during the low agrarian season. For example, some oil cooperatives in Lleida province, to ensure significant gains all year long to their seasonal production, have launched some tourism initiatives and some gastro-tourism products, converting their production and products into tourist attractions.

The Priorat region also counts the higher and oldest Catalan cooperatives, which have been able to convert their wine process, agriculture landscape, and products in a pull factor for the wine lovers increasing their sales and revive the socio-economic situation.

Rural tourism demand – tourist and excursionist profile

The demand side, constitutes by the tourists and excursionists, is a body-actor that only in recent years have been deeply considered, before it was thought only to obtain data helpful for commercial purposes (Cànoves, 2005). Based on the literature – industry, sector report, and of the first sources - the tourist profile in Catalonia corresponds mainly to the domestic market (see Chapter 2.3, Figure 16, data source Idescat), measurable by the accommodation occupancy report. Otherwise, it would be tricky to individuate the specific profile of the RT).

The RT demand characteristics are:

- Mainly Catalan that travel by car. An increase number of Spanish and international (before Covid-19) also travel by cars, even if some of them reach Catalonia by plane.
- Families or couple (35-60);
- Often excursionists, as depending on the location, the RE is almost absent.

The international demand that has developed and dramatically dropped due to Covid includes the French market (for proximity), UK, USA, and Germany.

4.2 The current (pre- and post-covid) Catalan 'rural tourism policy' agenda

Since the end of the XXI century, Spain and Catalonia have tried to re-launch rural tourism with two goals: the first one is to redistribute tourism flow from the coast to the internal, trying to diversify the tourist product from the 3S model, predominant in the area as Costa Brava. The second one is to promote socio-economic development in rural areas, in line with the European political agenda to stimulate progress in the poorer and more isolated areas. The Generalitat made various efforts to uniform the very heterogeneous RT supply sector among the last three decades. Firstly, it introduced the figure of the *gîtes*, independent rural accommodation of reduced size to be integrally rent, copying the French model (Decree 214/95). Then, in 2008, with the help of the ASETUR, the voluntary spike categorization system aligned with the European model. Unfortunately, the sector's homologation and professionalization have not been reached yet. There is still a lack of high-quality RT products in Catalonia, unlikely from other more mature rural destinations in Italy (England, French, Italy, etc.).

The Generalitat and the Agència Catalana de Turisme have been trying to relaunch rural tourism, incrementing the public aids and promoting the European funds through the action of public actors as the GALs have been quite active in the last years, especially some of them. The Strategic Plan for Tourism in Catalonia (2005-2010) recognizes the biodiversity and the landscape as one of the main assets and potential of RT in Catalonia.

Aligned with the TURESPAÑA action (Horizonte 2020), the Catalan public institutions have been trying to harmonize the offer, increase the marketing to position it in the international market, and invest in the formation for the professionalization of RT.

Following the example of other RA as Galicia, several Catalan initiatives were financed by public funds to implement new gastronomy tourist products tied with the rural areas' typical agriculture products, such as wine, oil, cheese, fruit, and dried fruit.

The strategic tourism plan of Catalonia 2018-2022, released by Agencia Catalana de Turisme in 2018, aims to position Catalonia as one of the best destinations in the Mediterranean and achieve the following objectives in 2022:

- Increase daily spending per tourist;
- Reach 37% of tourists who visit us in March, April, May, and October.
- Increase up to 10% of tourists staying in inland destinations.
- Intelligently manage growth to reach 21 million international tourists.

To achieve these objectives, the Plan establishes 7 strategic axes of work:

- Deliver one tourist experience Exceptional, including the improvement of the RT offer,
- Conquer and retain the suitable customers, in the case of Rt the domestic demand – Catalan- and the increase of the national and international demand, as French and UK market;
- Attract investment necessary, thanks to effective mobilization of private capital to develop new products and tourist services or improve the existing, as RT; and activating an entrepreneurship program also to support to the SMEs;
- Implement the best Smart tourism practices, including the European SmartVillage initiative that aims to improve the sustainable QL in rural villages in terms of mobility, and Internet connection, promoting the coworking spaces in rural areas to attract new professional residents (EU, 2017);
- Improve the competitiveness conditions, through a formation and marketing actions, also for RT;
- Improve management of tourist territories and their development, explaining that tourism in Catalonia is concentrated on the coast and in the city of Barcelona, especially internal non-

urban areas, suffer the lack of an integrated tourism planning that helps the distribution of flows throughout the territory;

- Rethink the organization, the management, and governance, especially for the weak tourism sector as RT. Catalonia will develop a new governance system to manage the sector's major issues through cooperation with key players in the industry.

In this Plan, the RT is defined as a low competitive and attractive product, and for this reason, it forecast its extension. Regarding sustainability, it proposes to improve the economic viability, local prosperity, quality of work – with an increase in quantity and quality, social equity, tourist satisfaction; local control; welfare of the local community, cultural richness. Also, with referring to both urban and rural, maintain and improve the quality of landscapes, and prevent degradation

physical and visual environment, as well as biological diversity; also minimize the use of those resources scarce and non-renewable in development operation of tourist infrastructures and service, and reduce air pollution, water and land, as well as a waste generation by tourists and tourism companies.

Right before the alarm state due to the global pandemic Covid-19, Marián Muro has been chosen new director of the Barcelona Turisme, the first woman in charge of this entity with a widely known in the tourism sector (Hosteltur, 2020). This choice represents a change of tendency in Barcelona tourism. This new stage reaffirms the City Council's commitment to public-private collaboration and the challenge of uniting a better promotion for balanced, quality, and sustainable tourism. She has been managing the crisis and preparing a response for the post-coronavirus, forging alliances with a shared strategic vision that allows the positioning of Barcelona and Catalonia as a tourist destination, innovative, entrepreneurial, and sustainable.

It has launched a Training Plan for tourism companies with webinars led by experts and specialists in various branches around tourism with studies, diagnoses, and strategies in segments and markets. Muro also revised the 2020 Action Plan, focusing on those actions with the highest return in the short and medium-term, in favor of the industry interests, and focused on the Spanish and local markets (Barcelona Turisme, 2020).

To recover, the Generalitat counts on spending 5.6million€ to recuperate almost the 50% of the tourist income (11-13 million € of tourist spending) thanks to the diversification of the tourism offer. The goal is to redistribute tourism throughout the territory, especially in the internal regions, thanks to the creation and extension of experiential products such as gastronomy, active, and adventure tourism, as unexploded sectors with high potential due to the new demand trends that emerged from the pandemic.

In this context, last August 2020, the decree 75/2020 has been approved regarding a new regulation of the rural tourism establishments, highlighting the possibility that the RE owners can share their housing with guests even if they do not obtain agricultural income. This option did not exist until now and allowed higher flexibility to the RT sector. The new regulation facilitates the opening of RE in small towns, similar to the Anglo-Saxon concept of Bed & Breakfast, since they can offer bed and breakfast in a small rural house where its owners reside.

According to the new regulation, RE must be located in the countryside, outside or within a housing unit of less than a thousand inhabitants, and in buildings prior to 1950. The maximum capacity is 15 places in the same building, with a maximum of 25 operated by the same owner among all types of rural tourism. The new regulations also provide information, assistance, and cleaning services in this type of accommodation and the proximity of the owners to customers in the case of non-shared establishments. Rural accommodation in municipalities with less than 30 inhabitants may host restaurants with a separate entrance and count a maximum of 30 places.

This new differentiation aims to avoid intrusion in a sector where second homes in rural environments have been used to do business, adopting the rural tourism nomenclature.

4.3 Best practices in rural tourism development in Catalonia

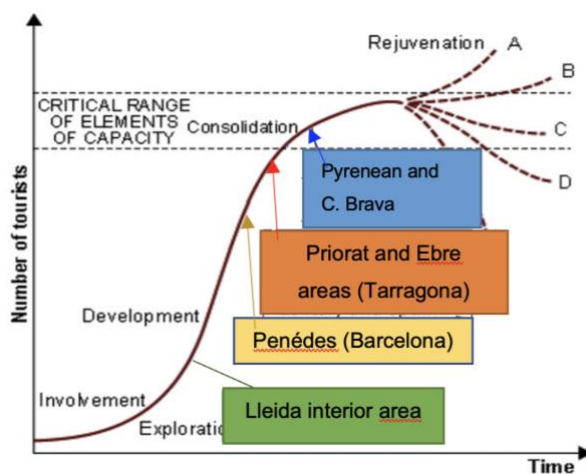
As it emerged, the RT in Catalonia presents a high heterogeneity in the REs quality and distribution and the different ways of working of these RE, especially of the comarcas and

federation group or associations that reunion them. This complex offer structure produced different results in terms of tourism depending on the geographic area its socio-economic pattern.

From the elaboration of Fig. 12 and 21, most of the REs are located in the Girona province between the Costa Brava and Pyrenees area, as RT is combined with sun&beach the mountain tourism products. A relevant number of REs and arrivals is also present in the Tarragona province, particularly the winery region of the Priorat and closer to the Terre del Ebre. An increasing number of REs is also registered in the Barcelona province as in the Penedés, another growing in relevance Catalan wineries area, and closer to Monserrat to satisfy the proximity demand of the metropolitan area. Lleida province, the most internal one, counts with the smallest number of REs and tourist arrivals, except the Pyrenean area.

The TALC model, Fig. 19, has been used to visualize these results, confirming that each province and comarcas are passing through a different phase of RT development.

Figure 19 TALC Model apply to the RT by Catalonia Province. Own elaboration 2021



Furthermore, it is important to highlight the relevance of the agriculture sector in those provinces, where three great agrarian zones stand out: one of the mountains with the Pyrenees and the Pre-Pyrenees, in which the extensive cattle ranch of bovine and ovine of meat predominates – meat and cheese products, the central zone and the plains of Girona in

which the cereal and the predominate intensive pig and beef cattle farming – meat products, and the western and southern regions, which account for around 70% of the arable land in Catalonia with a predominance of woody areas: vineyards and nuts – mainly in Tarragona, and olive groves, fresh fruit in Lleida province.

Some comarcas have linked agriculture with gastrotourism through patrimonialization and touristification of food products, productive landscapes, and gastronomy (Gascón, 2012), as earlier happened in Tuscany or Provence. It was possible also thanks to the local agro cooperatives efforts, as in the case of the Priorat.

Priorat (Tarragona) case

The Priorat is located in the province of Tarragona, between Campo de Tarragona and Tierras del Ebro. Geographically, it is located between a range of mountains to the north and to the south. It is a continental climate region, and it distinguishes for its geology is characterized by carboniferous age rocks with a variable degree of metamorphism.

Its economic base is agriculture, which has suffered a sharp decline throughout the twentieth century, with a consequent high abandon of the lands, becoming one of the most depopulated in recent decades - between 1900 and 1986 it lost more than half of its population. Between 1900-1935, the first wine cooperatives emerged as a new form of organization of winegrowers. It was a response to face the phylloxera plague and subsequent overproduction crises (Santos, 2018).

In recent years, the Priorat, traditionally specialized in viticulture and with strong associative history, has experienced radical transformations in the wine sector, with the development of the Catalan biggest agrocooperatives, as the Falset Marcià. They have represented a great promoter for the eno-tourism and the relaunch of the area, its landscape, and the wine products, generating a radical change to the downward trend during the XX century with a meaningful impact at the socio-economical level. Their efforts have led the region to be associated with quality wines, the denomination of origin (DOC) Priorat, produced in the central area, appreciated worldwide, and the Montsant Designation of Origin (DOC), made in the Lower Priorat.

In the Falset area, thanks to the relaunch generated by the eno-tourism, the mobility and

infrastructures are pretty improved, counting with renewing infrastructures, such as library, (international) schools, some new restaurants, and new restaurants buses line to reach the area. The improvement of the QL has attracted new residents, both Catalans, and internationals, increasing the inhabitant number.

The new agro-eno-tourism activity generates new job opportunities, increasing the employment index with many women involved in the eno-tourism sector.

It has been crucial, also, the action of the Priorat turisme, the tourist department of the comarca, and the Priorat enoturisme, a private association of small and medium wineries, to stimulate the development of the eno-tourism in this rural area and the promotion of different rural eno-touristic products. For example, several initiatives have been established, such as Priorat Wine Festival, the regional wineries fair that includes itinerary between the villages as “Gratallops – Taste amb dones” to support equality rights. Another event is the Wine Day festival in the middle of September to celebrate the grape harvest and the local traditions. A sustainable and innovative initiative is the “Marató del Priorat, ” a marathon promoting the area's agricultural landscape to attract a specific target market.

In 2020, the Covid pandemic and the grapevine fungus that affects the harvest affected Priorat tourism. Thanks to the strong domestic demand, the promotion, and the marketing of tourism, the winery region has been increasing in terms of number of visits and overnights in 2020 and 2021.

Lleida province case

The Lleida interior area has been recognized as underdeveloped in terms of RT, with many REs and RT products. Recently, agro-cooperativism has been quite active in promoting rural tourism linked to local agricultural processes and products, particularly the oil productions and the fruit sector. Since the late XX, the agro-cooperatives have been increasing together with their more recent effort to relaunch the agroindustrial activities through tourism, trying to emulate the success of the oleo-tourism initiative of other countries areas as Lombardia and Tuscany in Italy, and the Priorat cooperative movement in Catalonia.

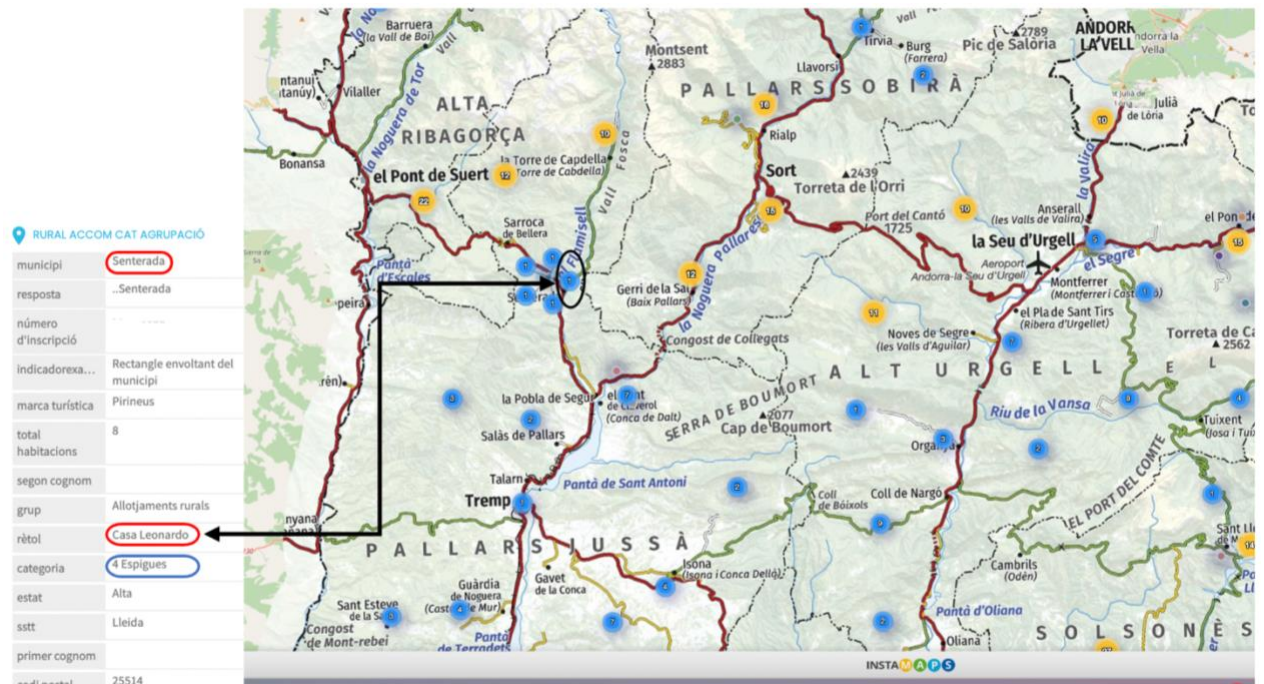
Also, at the public level, several municipalities have been making a solid effort to connect the relaunch of agriculture through tourism, trying to valorize the territory, products, and landscape.

For example, the Aitona municipality in 2018 has launched the *Aitona en Flor* initiative, with the commitment of Segrià in Lleida town and its agro-cooperatives, to transform its fruit wealth, the peach trees blooming, into a hallmark of identity and tourist claim. To manage it, they have created the tourist brand *Fruiturisme* with a specific department and booking center in the municipality building. It organizes guided tours of the most spectacular private peach farms in flowering season and other similar proposals such as visits in autumn to see the change of leaves in this area of crops. In 2020, COVID19 paralyzed this activity that was adding more and more visitors, and by 2021 the activity guided by the farm was first canceled, with a relaunch on the Fruiturisme social networks to following the flowering on streaming, and then slowly reactivated, taking into account all the restrictions imposed for the pandemic. The City Council has set up an information point in the town's sports center to offer information on the routes to be made by visitors also in autonomy.

Casa Leonardo and 5 Llacs RT product in Senterada, Pallars, Alta Lleida

Senterada is a municipality of the region of the Pallars Jussà located in the northwestern part of the Lleida province. It counts with a pre-Pyrenees landscape, between two valleys formed by the confluence of the Flamisell and the Bòssia river. The traditional economic activity was totally linked to the agriculture of auto-consumption and livestock. In recent years, it has specialized in mountain crops to feed cattle (fodder, pastures, and cereals). According to Generalitat's Labor Observatory (2019), Senterada was the sixth municipality with the highest unemployment rate in Catalonia. In the last 25 years, the tourism sector has grown thanks to second homes rise, and some REs owners' actions, supported by the Pireneu Occidental GAL.

Figure 20 Casa Leonardo location, Senterada, Pallars, Alta Lleida



An important actor for the relaunch of tourism in the area is the owner of Casa Leonardo, Mireira Font. She has been interviewed to a deep comprehension of the Senterada tourism situation and its RT products and to examine to the new projects “Senterada Viu” promoted by the Catalan observatory of RRN in its press conference.

Casa Leonardo is a rural house cataloged with 4 spikes (Figure 20), located in Senterada in a low REs density area in the Pyrenees region, under Lleida province.

In the interview (Annex 5), Mireira, archaeology background, has explained that she returned to the village in 2001 and decided to reopen the hostelry and a grocery store – which has been musealized - that the grandfather established at the begging of the XX century. The refurbishments were possible thanks to two LEADER funds, while she is now waiting for the third one to improve the Casa Leonardo in terms of water and electricity efficiency. She confirmed the relevant help that the European funds represented to make possible the

restoration of the two activities, explaining that the main difficulty is the long and complex bureaucracy to obtain them.

Also, she gives importance to the certification - Casa Leonardo counts with 4 spikes and several ecolabels and rewards on TripAdvisor. She interprets the categorization as a project that helps the possible customer to understand the type of services and facilities of the RE, and consequently as indicators of the range of price. Being the categorization volunteer, and often no updated, it is not useful to homogenize and help the customers, as the majority are small REs not interests invest to improve the service. She also confirms that the label and spikes are valuable for marketing and improvement' goals. Mireira has explained the priority of a sustainable tourism model to revive the local economy, involving the local farmers and evaluating the landscape that they keep working. In this sense, she cooperates with them using KMO products, selling their products and promoting them to the visitors as part of the local culture.

An important project that contradistinguishes the RT in Senterada is the young ecotourist product of "5 Llacs". It has risen from the rejoining of the 7 SMEs of the area in the Marques del Pastor association, which involves Casa Leonardo, the other 5 REs, and the local travel agency. The 5 Llacs consists of a self-guided eco-route of 100km between the highest Pyrenean foothills, which includes (Figure 21) train ticket from to Lleida, six nights in the REs of the area to redistribute the visitants between all the local accommodations, plus lunch boxes made with traditions products.

Figure 21 "5 Llacs eco RT product". Source www.elcinquellac.com



This product has been quite successful and meaningful in terms of redistribution of the incomes between the local enterprises, and also the tourists within the territory avoid their massification in just a few icon spots. It also aims to contrast the high tourism seasonality in the area, attracting ecotourists from March to July, in September and October. It is also born from the ecologic concern of receiving an increasing number of international tourists, arriving by own cars, which strongly impact the fragile biodiversity of this Pyrenean area. The product is for wealthy customers aligned with sustainability principles. The middle-high price for a group of 1/4 people max, counting that the 10% is invested in recovering the traditional dried stones paths.

Due to the increasing number of international arrivals, in 2019 the Marques del Pastor association collaborated with the Pireneu Occidental GAL, which helped at the financial and technical level – website, CO2 emission calculator, design of the project - launched the project “Gratitud Pallars”. The project has been financed at 90% by Leader fond, the rest by the association. Its main goals are to change the mindset of the visitors, prevent meaningless waste, such as drive-up with the own car, water waste, contamination, etc., and a significant engagement and interaction with the LC and local traditions. It counts with four initiatives: “dry-stone walls sponsor” to restore the dry-stone walls and paved trails that line the route, “become a voluntary” for the dry-stone recuperation, “offset the carbon footprint” by donating to one of the micro-reserves, and “micro-reserves”, developed a series of agreements with landowners in Pallars, whose aim is the biodiversity conservation, and, at the same time, offer a space to visitors for activities in tie contact with the natural world (nature therapy, yoga, Tai Chi, etc.). The association and the GAL consider this project very relevant in terms of employment generation and income.

Regarding the visitor’ profile of Casa Leonardo and 5 Llacs, before Covid19 the 40% of the visitors were international (mainly French, UK, German), with a high presence in the low season. The rest, 60%, were Catalans. Due to the pandemic, almost all the customers are Catalans, mainly from Barcelona metropolitan area, with a low number of national and international (2%). When the restrictions became softer, all the people from Catalan urban

areas were reserving with an increment of the demand and occupancy until the 90% from May until now.

During the pandemic, in Senterada, a tiny village of 50 persons in winter, an association of residents, with Mireira leadership, creates a new initiative, *Senterada viu*, that responds to the social and ecological crisis, promoting community resilience and self-sufficiency. It aims to restore exchange, cooperation, the common good, and the idea of working food self-sufficiency. The goals are having comestible municipal gardens, recovering the orchard to make organic farming, and recovering a social space that stimulates to think about future needs. Indeed, the project seeks community resilience by being declining, ecological, feminist, collaborative, supportive, and democratic. Senterada viu is a match-funding project of the provincial councils, the Institute for the Development and Promotion of the Hautes-Pyrénées and Aran (IDAPA), the Generalitat, the Leader Consortium GAL Alt Urgell - Cerdanya, the Leader Consortium Pirineu Occidental, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (Lavanguardia, 2021).

For both initiatives – Gratiud Pallars and Senterada viu – the associations have asked for and obtained a youth guarantee help to train young people over six months.

Also, Casa Leonardo and 5 Llacs collaborate with different GAL' projects as *Al teu gust*, *Productes del Pallars*, etc. They also count with the subscription to Lleida's tourist houses federation and TURALCAT, considered two relevant public bodies that facilitate the networking and, especially, help in terms of formation, administration, and marketing thanks to their webpages.

To summarize, Casa Leonardo has been chosen as an example of a thriving rural house (4 spikes). Its owner has been a promoter of networking and innovation in the area through the collaboration with others REs and with the LC, generating a high impact in the community at the socio-economic and environmental level, such as 5 Llacs, Gratiud Pallars and Senterada Viu.

Also, an interesting case of collaboration between SMEs and residents rejoin in associations to enhance the socio-economic development of this rural area facing a substantial depopulation.

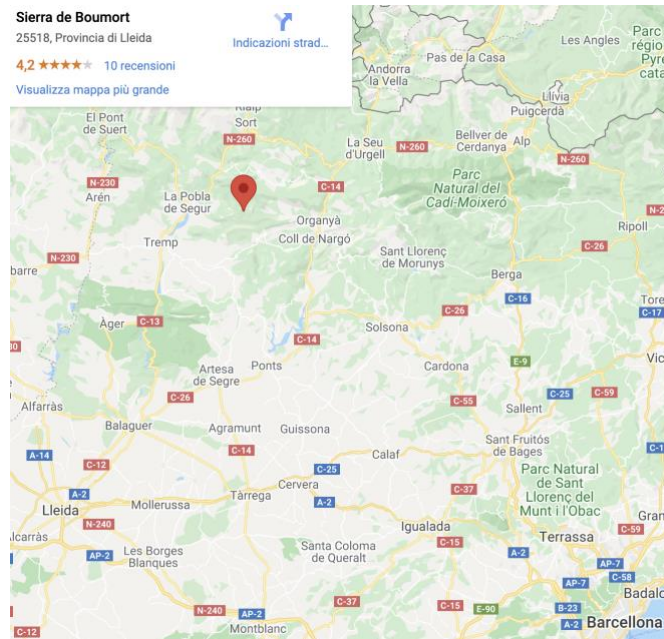
Casa Leonardo and the 5 Llacs are a sample of RT high-quality products recognized by certifications. They received the support of European funds (Leader), GAL (Pireneu Occidental), and Catalan administrations (Lleida and Generalidad). Also, they attract international demand and increase the domestic one, mainly due to the pandemic effects, including almost all the SMEs of the territory for an equal distribution of the tourist income. This tourism model is evaluated as sustainable in the long-term with educative and preventive environmental actions, like the one of Gratiu Pallars, with special care of the historical-cultural heritage, biodiversity conservation, and environmental impact reduction.

Boumortlindomit and Casa Rossa - Alt Urgell, Lleida

Taús is a town in the municipality of Valls d'Aguilar, in the Alt Urgell. The population of the village, home to over 300 people less than a century ago, then due to the agriculture Agriculture is traditionally the basis of its economy. It suffered a sharp decline throughout the XX century, and consequently the abandonment of the lands, becoming a relatively depopulated area that now counts 33 residents.

As the owners explained in the interview (Annex 3), Casa Rossa is a rural accommodation launched in 2016 that aims to recover and highlight the natural, cultural, and ethnological heritage of the village of Taús, where it is located (Figure 22), intending to attract tourists to the area.

Figure 22 Casa Rossa and BoumortIndomit location, Lleida. Source Boumortindomit.com



Casa Rossa, family property, is the restoration of the old straw loft and stables, refurbished thanks to two Leader aids, and it is now waiting for the third one to expand the house. It's an efficient construction made by wood of 3 floors and 300 m², the refurbishment happened with passive construction criteria, using proximity materials, and sustainable energy. Indeed, the house generates more energy than the one that consumes during the year. Because of its construction with efficient wood, its energy saving compared to a traditional building it's around 90%. The photovoltaic roof made by solar plaques of 5kw generates a quite amount of energy that can be used in very different ways, as bicycles load or electric vehicles.

Casa Rossa's owners have been the promoter of the recent project BoumortIndomit, a cooperative that is committed, from the social economy, to an ecotourism project that promotes the conservation of biodiversity and the cultural heritage of Boumort.

Tourism cooperative includes 3 local SMEs:

- Can Rossa, the eco-sustainable RE;
- Salvatgines, a nature guide company that aims to help visitors get to know the wildlife of the Pyrenees and Pre-Pyrenees, being the Boumort area a referent in terms of Pyrenean fauna and flora;
- Refugi de Cuberes, a family-run refuge business, sits at an altitude of 1,480 m, in the heart of a forest, near the village of Cuberes. The building was an old forest house that has been renovated and adapted to its new purpose. The owner is, also, in charge of the foodservice.

They also consider fundamental part of the cooperative local products, collaborating local producers to recover traditional mountain cuisine dishes, made of KM0 products as vegetables, the ecologic meat of the Taús cattle, dairy products as the cheese, and the local wine.

Its main goal is to revive the Taús area by relaunching the local economy through tourism activity and attracting new residents to repopulate the village. The three activities have been collaborating for the last five years. The idea of forming a cooperative has been motivated to apply for the *Singulars Project* fund, granted by the Generalitat (Department of Work, Socials and cooperative). The grand funding counts with € 60.000.

This joining choice was also motivated by the consciousness that they could not generate much demand and benefits for the territory as singular enterprises.

The first year, they worked on the cooperative's structure - each of the three parties has a person hired by the cooperative, a person in charge of communication, and the product design, which counts with guided activities, transport, accommodation, and food. Then, the cooperative has worked on the website launch, the ecotourist packages design, and the catalog for marketing them. Until this moment, they were selling the products through intermediary agencies or directly as private parties.

BoumortIndomit eco-product is an all-inclusive product thought for an eco-tourist interested in environmental and social values in line with the sustainable tourism in this specific area, with high interest in its biodiversity and tourism active activities. This product also seeks to be an

out-of-peak-season one to attract visitors in the low season to have a lower impact on the territory and the LC.

The individuate audience is a European market: French, English, German, Scandinavian. Regarding mobility, the idea is to generate as lower as possible impact, with a group max eight people that can be picked up and drop off from the closest train station, as most excursions are done by foot. The eco-product design is an HQ eco-tourist product for wealthy customers (1200-1500€ per person per week).

The cooperative seeks to represent a sustainable tourism activity to promote the socio-economic development of the area. The majority of the benefits are reinvested in projects at the environmental, cultural, and social levels. For example, recently cooperative has fixed a public road, and published a book with the history of Boumort to revive the local history and traditions. Since the first moment, the LC has been informed and included in the cooperative development, with test tours and meetings. Residents were skeptical at the begging, but once visitors started to arrive, the LC was enthusiastic to see new people to interchange their culture with.

Due to Covid-19, the cooperative has faced a rough beginning, but on the other hand, it has more time to organize the tourist packages. On the other hand, since late summer 2020, Casa Rossa has seen an increase in bookings from the domestic market, which allowed them to be independent of big operators like Booking.com. Now almost 90% of bookings come from Casa Rossa website. While Boumort Indomit has received quite good contacts, as it was born as a de-seasonal product - from April to the end of July – the cooperative did not count with any customers yet.

To summarize, this case study has been chosen for the innovative form of tourist cooperative that Boumort Indomit launched thanks to the Generalitat fond and its social-economy business purpose. It aims to be an engine for the sustainable development of this unpopulated area in the Pyrenees and Pre-Pyrenees region. Its goals are to create new employment opportunities and socio-economic benefits and to attract new residents.

Boumort Indomit recognizes cooperativism as a critical factor in obtaining a higher impact and income for improving the QL.

Also, it discerns the need to offer a high-quality tourism product, attract tourists out of the high season, and revalorize the biodiversity and local food products to support the local SMEs (farms and restaurants).

La Granadella municipality and oil cooperative, the Museu i Centre de la Cultura de l'Oli de Catalunya (MuOC i CCOC) - Les Garrigues, Lleida

La Granadella is a town and municipality located in the southwest of Les Garrigues region, in Lleida province. The main activity is agriculture, especially the cultivation of olives, almonds, and cereals. The transformation industry is linked to the primary sector.

Due to the drop in the cereals price and the winery's phylloxera plague, Les Garrigues became an oil producer specialized area since the end of the XIX century, when it starts a new phase for the agriculture sector and the region in terms of new population. Immigration flows from the south of the Country brought the tradition of oil tree cultivation. Indeed, the icons of the areas are the oil tree fields and the mill, being a windy zone.

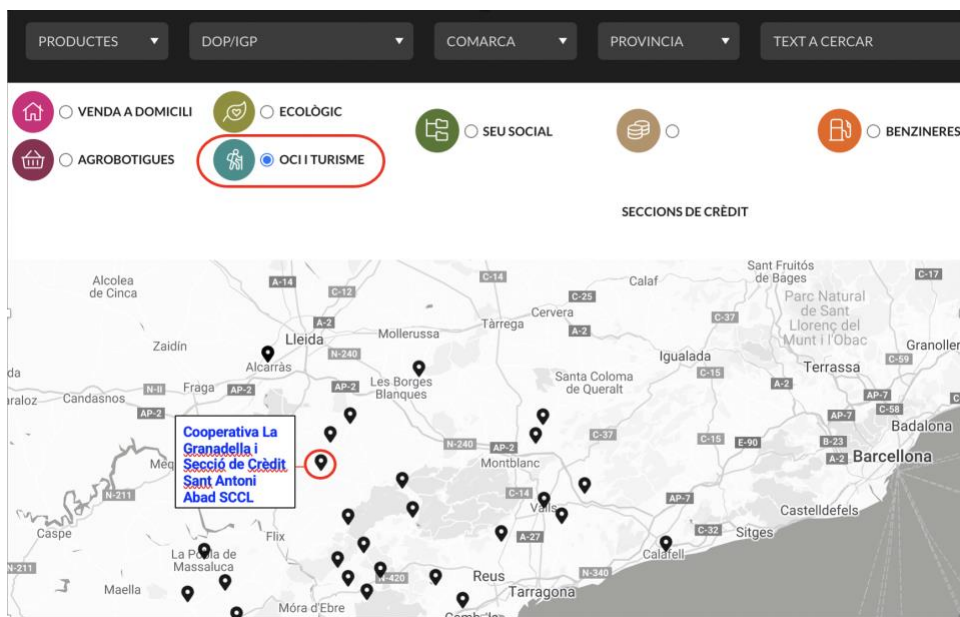
La Granadella cooperative was created in 1920 to provide olive oil from the farmer directly to the consumer. By joining forces, the farmers recognized in the cooperative form a better way to meet the market's demand for quality and service and, of course, always guarantee a product of the highest quality and flavor.

The cooperative construction dates back to 1920 when the Commonwealth of Catalonia built it and named it Sindicat Agrícola Sant Antoni. In 1986, the building fell into disuse, and thanks to the combined efforts of the municipality-cooperative, it was musealized and relaunched as "The Catalan Oil Museum". The refurbishment was possible thanks to the LEADER aids. It has maintained the original collection of machinery, tools, equipment, and authentic items for the technical processes and counts with mixed spaces' functions and managements. The museographic adaptation adds a cultural function that includes the agro-shop and museum reception. Also, it links the productive and commercial activity of the Cooperative with territorial development projects related to oil tourism, which are managed by the municipality. In 2015 it was declared a Site of Cultural Interest. In 2019, the local artist Lily Brick, from Lleida, painted a mural paying tribute to the olive tree cultivation, traditional production process, and culture of olive oil. The Cooperative La Granadella is an example of continuity

for the agricultural production sector and versatility in adapting to the socio-economic change of the last decades.

The cooperative La Granadella is a member of the Federation of Cooperatives of Catalonia and is promoted on its website as one with leisure and tourism activities (see figure 26). In the Les Garrigues area, there is a designation of origin with the same name. Still, unfortunately 50% of the production is outside the designation of origin, which is a weak point that the area has. The recent hidro-system – that brings the water from the Ebre land – has made it possible to ensure the harvest every year and consequently to avoid the abandonment of the agriculture sector, and of the grounds from part of the population, whose density is stable. Now a new mill is being built near the establishment and there will be a merger of the cooperatives, La Granadella and Torrebesses, a neighboring municipality.

Figure 23 Agro-cooperatives with leisure and tourism offers, in Catalonia. Source Federation of Cooperatives of Catalonia



La Granadella has been a pioneer in Catalonia of oil tourism, which started 10 years ago. A first action of the city council was to take over the convent that was about to fall, and thanks to a LEADER fond, restored it to convert the structure in the *Center of the oil culture of*

Catalonia, ensuring this title as a matter of prestige for marketing strategy. The center hosts cultural functionalities and counts with an annual program of activities.

For the oil tourism launch, the municipality looked at the sample of the eno-tourism, more developed by that time, and decided to specialized itself by linking oil tourism with art. The focus of attention is on three axes: art, gastronomy, and health, with the double objective: (1) attracting tourists, while (2) giving an add-value to the oil through the link oil – farmers and local community – traditional landscape valorization. From the interview with the municipality representative, it emerged the efforts made in terms of branding and marketing to increase the income of the cooperative, recognizing tourism as a means to hold the population at the territory and reverse the depopulation.

A plan of activities is elaborated quarterly. The most relevant are linked to gastronomy and oil production like the product presentation - oil, wine, jams, honey, etc. Training activities as technical conferences for the oil sector, marketing seminars, etc. The Oil Center, for example, is the Oil Tasting CLUB for professionals (people who work in private mills, restaurants, cooperatives, farmers, rural houses, in tourism...).

Other events linked to the culture of oil: the *Oil Fair* in November; *Oleaterra*, in spring, with art events in unique spaces within the territory; and also, the *Forum vergi extra* to discuss the oil quality and oil tourism offer management - with a national and international audience.

Educational projects and workshops have been launched in collaboration with several schools.

Regarding the linkage with the art, a successful activity is OliverArt, an art contest that includes temporary exhibitions at the Oil Center, and the *Sculptural Walk* in Terres del Ebre panoramic point – visited during the fieldwork, promoted by LANDart, a project that links art to nature and landscape.

For example, as tourist products, *Local Nature* is a 4-route itinerary, providing a self-guided route that highlights the local landscape and cultural heritage spots. Another one is *Buricletas* (*burro* in Spanish means donkey), an App for an electric-bike route with a GPS that advises on the proximity of the place of interest, using the sound of the donkey, and explains the site.

It counts with two routes, one going north, towards the Pyrenees, and another that goes south, towards Ebro lands.

These activities attract excursionists, mainly the domestic market, couples, or families as demand profile. The municipality will open in 2022 hostel to make up for the lack of REs in the areas, creating an overnight possibility to increase the economic tourism impact on the territory. The more flexible regulation on REs, updated by the decree of 2020, is boosting the pop-up of new accommodation projects that will support the redistribution of possible tourists within the territory, creating employment, reviving the local economy.

Indeed, the LC and local enterprises have happily accepted tourism, and benefits from marketing, fairs, events, writers, press conferences, social media management by the city council.

The majority of the initiatives are financed with the incomes from the wind farm. The city council also collaborates with the local GAL, called Associació Leader de Ponent. For example, in Spring 2020, thanks to GAL, la Granadella received a Leader aid to put photovoltaic panels for self-consumption, avoid CO2 emissions, and become electric-efficient. In recent years, the Generalitat de Catalunya has supported oil tourism, launching work-groups, one called "Gastronomic Experience" to debate the gastro-ole-tourism evolution, including bench-market trips to other country's territories, also at the international level.

The various activities have pushed collaborations between SMEs and the creation of networks. The Oil Tasting Club (restaurateurs, farmers, etc.) has boosted networks between local actors and economic evolution on the territory. For example, farmers have made their oil brand, oil menu in restaurants, tourism companies that have included oil route in their products, etc. Also, the "Catalan oil tourism network" is an initiative launched by the Generalitat to promote the exchange experiences between professionals from different European regions (Italy, France, etc.).

Due to Covid, some activities have been suspended. Consequently, the visits number and income dropped in 2020 with a slow recovery at the end of summer 2021.

The council and La Granadella cooperative have been investing in recovery actions such as better marketing and promotion on social media, a turnover of the employees in favor of specialized tourism professionals, and creating a hostel in the municipality's historic center.

To summarize, the city council and La Granadella cooperative is a clear example of joining efforts between public and private. It also shows how RT initiatives linked to the agriculture sector and products - the oil and olives production and the mills, can efficiently boost the local economy and generate extra incomes to avoid the depopulation and the abandonment of the traditional economic activities. This case also demonstrates how Leaders aids have been successfully spent to support tourism and rural development projects.

Local products and agriculture processes have been revalorized by launching a bunch of tourism initiatives, mainly connected with gastronomy and art, following the example of the more mature eno-tourism and with a strong bench-market between Spanish and international regions.

The Cooperative La Granadella is an excellent example of how cooperative efforts changed the economic scenario. Its collaboration with the city council represents a sample of interrelationship able to improve the socio-economic level in the territory. Unfortunately, the impact on the LC improvement of the QL is still low, and new measures to make up for this weakness have been planned to increase the sustainable impact of tourism within the population and the territory.

Considerations

All the above case studies show a commitment from local stakeholders with an evident bottom-up approach thanks to SMEs' actions, as Casa Leonardo and Casa Rossa, towards developing sustainable, high-quality RT products, recognizing a general lack of this offer in Catalonia, especially in the Lleida province. These SMEs have been the promoter of best practices launching new RT projects that embrace the sustainability concept and aim to involve the LC for a significant impact at the socio-economic level, as 5 Llacs and BoumortIndomit. They recognize the importance of certification and good marketing to reach the target market, who should be interested in high-quality RT products and active tourism activities. These socially responsible projects count on the visitors' consciousness of their impact on the visited places at the environmental and socio-economic levels. They seek visitors opened towards a higher price contributes to the enhancement of a sustainable

development model. This proposed model includes tourism and conservation activities to preserve the biodiversity and cultural heritage of this rural area, among a revalorization of the traditions and the local products, including the residents.

On the other end, following this perspective, public authorities such as the Generalitat the Catalonia and city councils as Aitona and La Granadella ones demonstrate their implication in the agriculture sector's revival through rural tourism. Their programs include a revalorization of the agricultural processes and products, as in oil production or the fruit harvest.

The agro-cooperatives have had a vital role in these agriculture activities and food patrimonialization. Thanks to their efforts, as in the wineries case in Priorat, they have obtained a great success that radically changed the region's socio-economic structure. Unfortunately, unlike the other cases, the eno-tourism in Priorat represents a counterexample of success in terms of high impact on the territory and on the redistribution of the incomes within the residents, who have benefits of a relevant improvement in the infrastructure, allowing better mobility and rise of QL.

Even if the other reported cooperativism cases have not yet reached such a high impact on social structure, it is worth mentioning that significant steps have been made thanks to their efforts and with the essential European aids. The Leaders aids and the collaboration with the GALs have been, indeed, an important starting point to the rural development in Catalonia, representing a case of success in using these public helps.

4.4 Opportunities from EU funding

The European Commission is a central agent for the socio-economic evolution and consequences of the QL improvement in rural areas. Since the establishment of the CEE, between 1989-1993, the EU Commission has granted the first financial aids, LEADER, to promote rural development in less “developed and fragile areas”. In response, Spain organized the first GALs to support territorial development. A series of European aids (FEDER, FEOGA, Cohesion Assets) have been consecutively launched to reinforce the Country member’s efforts to upgrade the mobility, infrastructures, and the living conditions of the rural residents towards notable equality compare to urban areas.

After three decades, meaningful steps towards this equality have been taken almost everywhere in Europe, especially in the West. Spain and Catalonia have confirmed as a great example of managing these public aids, even if the hoped objectives have not been reached yet.

These European assets and the corresponding national grants aim to transform the agricultural areas into multifunctional spaces with the diversification of economic activities from just the agricultural ones. Indeed, since the end of the XX century, the public authorities identify the unbalance distribution between crowded urban areas and the increasing depopulated rural areas as a master issue for the sustainable development of any society in the long term. After three decades, this issue is more than ever-present and enhanced by the recent Covid-19 global pandemic.

At the regional, national, and European levels, public grants still aim to significantly transform the peripheries and rural areas to avoid their abandonment towards a massification around urban hubs. Consequently, employee's shortcoming for the traditional agro-industrial sector, which is fundamental for the food sustenance of the whole population, can generate a dramatic scarcity of agricultural products. Also, it can degenerate in a due-effect vicious circle of subsequently negative situations as food crisis, health, and economic crisis, until civil war, as already happened in the long humanity-history. In this sense, it is essential to remind that the UNTWO agenda of SGDs aims precisely to prevent this kind of situation.

Covid-19 has shown the fragility of the consume society and raised the levels of hunger affecting people's ability to access sufficient and nutritious food (Clapp, 2020).

The pandemic has generated a double situation: on the one hand, it pushed the Governments, as European Commission and nations, to reinforce the investment in the rural areas to recover from the negative impacts, reviving the local economy tie the LC to the lands, and trying to attract to new residents to keep diversifying the social-economic structure. Indeed, the crisis sounded like a call for transformative change in food systems towards food sovereignty and supported local markets, disrupting the supply chains on a global scale. On the other hand, the pandemic shows the global food system as incredibly resilient, mainly

thanks to the LC that some areas have launched auto-sufficient projects, such as Senterada Viu, in the Lleida province.

The European Commission and its country member have renewed a series of initiatives, as INTERREG III, LEADER+, and set up new financial instruments to respond to the renewed needs of the current society regarding food, safety, environmental protection, and QL improvement. It represents a response to the alarm of a possible agricultural (and food) crisis, and consequent cultural heritage loss of the “immaterial” resources that these traditional activities represent.

In addition, in 2020, it has put forward a “Long-term vision for EU’s rural areas” with the aim is again incrementing the chances for sustainable development of the rural regions relaunching activities agriculture, farming, and forestry, to support the growth of the manufacturing and services industry, including tourism. Indeed, RT has experienced exponential growth in the last year and a half, thanks to its characteristics of open-air activities in contact with nature and tie to gastronomy activities of traditional and slow-food products.

After the pandemic, the EU has launched a European Recovery Plan activating the new NEXTGeneration funds, a significant opportunity for the socio-economic rural area’s development.

Spain and Catalonia

The (NGEU) aims to digitalize and modernise Spain's tourism supply and boost less well-established destinations, such as the rural ones, supporting the diversification of tourism supply and thereby maintain its competitive edge over the rest of the international markets. In June 2021, the European Commission accepted Spain's recovery and resilience plan⁴. It disbursed €69.5 billion in grants under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) over 2021-2026 to emerge stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Spain's plan contributes to the European challenges in containing measures that effectively support the green and digital transitions; and contribute to strengthening the country's growth potential, job creation, and economic and social resilience.

The plan allocates 40% of its total to support climate objectives. It considers urban and long-distance sustainable mobility, increases the energy efficiency of buildings, decarbonizes

industry and reduces energy dependency, and deploys new technologies for green hydrogen and renewables. The plan also includes measures to help mitigate the adverse effects of climate change by preserving coastal spaces, ecosystems, and biodiversity and promoting the circular economy by improving water and waste management.

While 28% of the resources are devoted to the digital transition, which includes the digitalization of the public administration, industry, business, and SMEs, there are also investments in digital equipment for education and improving digital skills.

Also, the Commission's assessment considers that Spain's plan includes an extensive set of mutually reinforcing reforms and investments to activate measures in the areas of employment to reduce labor market segmentation and enhance active labor market policies, as the rural areas.

In addition, the NextGeneration funds helped revive the commitment of the RRN and the GALs in promoting rural development through programs that aim to increase employment, entrepreneurship, and job creation; the promotion of quality local products. Other projects launched regard technological and business innovation; territorial development of mountain areas; efficient use of natural resources, energy efficiency, climate change mitigation; landscape-related activities, women and actions to facilitate non-discrimination in access to the labor market, etc.

A clear example related to the employment increase is the Odisseu project established by the LAG Consorci Alt Urgell-Cerdanya, which aims to encourage the return of young people to their rural areas of origin. Achieving this involves the leading agents that affect this transition, from universities and training centers to local companies and administrations involved in rural development policies.

All the 12 Catalan GALs have launched the project in entrepreneurship and employment, and new actions to support cooperativism and coworking work, to follow the European Parliament on Smart Eco-Social Villages. This pilot project identifies communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities. They rely on a participatory approach to develop and implement their strategy to improve their economic, social, and environmental conditions by mobilizing solutions offered by digital

technologies. Smart Villages benefit from cooperation and alliances with other communities and actors in rural and urban areas.

Several GAL' projects are directly linked to tourism in rural areas, which is interpreted as a tool for cultural and natural heritage conservation and valorization (artistic and literary heritage, historical heritage, ethnographic heritage, architectural gastronomy, intangible heritage).

For example, Consorci per al Desenvolupament de la Catalunya Central / Central Catalonia GAL launched the Sustainable tourism, wildlife, nature project. It aims to promote the transformation of traditional tourism into a new tourism sustainable and responsible that adds value with new activities such as ecotourism, nature tourism, or health and therapeutic tourism. The GAL's mission is to support the growth and consolidation of micro-enterprises and agri-food SMEs, especially those that propose differentiated and quality productions while strengthening industrial and service subsectors, whether traditional or emerging sectors. In addition, to promote the territory, highlighting the differential features based on the natural, architectural, cultural, and historical heritage, and also QL improvement thanks to offering proximity services to the population in dispersed habitat and greater social inclusion, especially attention to groups at risk of exclusion, young people and women (Leader Cat Central, 2020).

Finally, it is relevant to highlight the high experience and successful management that in Spain and Catalonia, the SMEs and GALs have in applying and managing European and national grants. These grants and their correct use have allowed many rural areas and Catalonia SMEs to grow highly at the socio-economical level. Unfortunately, the path is still long and convoluted to reach the balanced equality at a territorial level between urban and rural areas toward a similar QL standard.

4.5 Risks and challenges for sustainable rural tourism and the importance of the development of cooperativism

Since the end of the XX century, public agents and the political agenda have always been more focused on applying sustainability criteria. The Brundtland Rapport in 1987, and the Cumbre de la Tierra in Río de Janeiro in 1992, the first world conference of heads of state on the environment and climate change, represent trivial moments for the evolution of the sustainable development concepts. To ensure sustainable development, RT should use existing capital resources, providing payback and reconstitution of them (inter-generational efficiency), and distributing the obtained benefits and wealth between social classes or groups (intra-generational equity) within the territory (territorial balance).

Many institutional statements have established the theoretical principles of sustainable tourism. Some of them are for example are Declaration of Manita (UNWTO, 1980), Acapulco Documents

(UNWTO, 1982), Declaration of Tourism Rights and Tourism Quality (Sofia, UNWTO, 1985), Hague Declaration (UNWTO, 1989)). Here we highlight: The Sustainable Tourism Charter of Lanzarote, 1995, The Declaration of Calvià on Tourism and sustainable development in the Mediterranean, 1997 and the Québec Declaration on Ecotourism, 2002 (Cànoves, 1997). In 2002, during the Sustainable Development of the United Nations Summit in Johannesburg, the UNWTO reviewed the definition of sustainable tourism considering all tourism sectors, including mass tourism (UNWTO, 2004). Recently, the action of the UNWTO has been significant, culminating in *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) and the establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (see Figure 5. Chap. 2), the 17 guidelines for sustainable development, which have also represented the basis for long-term strategies and Covid-19 recovery plans. Amongst these are: sustainable communities, climate action, decent work, zero hunger, and economic growth - with attention to rural areas - and equality in terms of injustice reduction and gender gaps.

As Baidal (2003) explains, in Spain, tourism evolution started in 1930-60, with a boosting

phase focused on increasing visitors' numbers towards mass tourism to recover from WWII. Then it follows a renewed interest in the social welfare of the industry and society accompanied by the need for a tourism impact compensation through a new redistribution of the tourist flows. Indeed, in the 80-90s, the environmental and social tourism impacts were taken into account, and a new model of strategic planning was applied, culminating in the sustainable overview application launched at the beginning of the XXI century. With the entrance in the CEE, Spain and Catalonia gave a new input to the tourism model, supporting the creation of the RT as a strategy to recuperate demography in the internal areas, fighting the abandonment of the traditional activities and the lands. On the other hand, another goal was to redistribute the tourist flows from the congested and over-cemented coastline within the territory, pursuing a territory balance and more equal benefits' distribution. Also, the RT has been considering an activity that contrasts the seasonality typical of the tourism industry and is highly compatible with other sectors, such as agriculture. Indeed, RT was also born to be a tool for the agricultural processes revalorization and local products enhancement, representing an extra income for the farmers and, again, a way to contrast the seasonality also typical of the agriculture sector.

The Spanish government and Catalonia RA have also been active on sustainability themes and their application in the industry, such as tourism. The Strategic Tourism Plan of Catalonia 2013-2016 and National Tourism Guidelines 2020 define the principles for the Catalan tourism model in the medium term. It guides the tourism policy of all the sector agents, governed by criteria of sustainable competitiveness, to ensure the balance between quantity and quality of tourism for the future continuity based on economic, environmental, cultural, and social. Programa de Desarrollo Rural de Catalunya 2014-2020.

Then, with the Rural Development Program of Catalonia 2014-2020, the Catalan government recognized the highly crowded model of consumer tourism that has developed in different areas of Catalonia, especially on the coast and, to a lesser extent, in the Pyrenees, during the last decades. This tourist activity is characterized by high seasonality, in the summer and Easter months, in the case of sun & beach tourism, and during the winter months in the case of mountain tourism. To contrast this mass tourism, RT has been launched. It represents an alternative tourism typology, less intensive, based on hiking, ecotourism, agrotourism, wildlife

observation, or adventure sports. RT tends to be more compatible with conserving biodiversity and socio-cultural heritage, considered fundamental elements of attractiveness for the visitor. Its lower seasonality and higher visitor profitability can facilitate adjusting the volume of tourists to the territory's carrying capacity - the maximum number of visitors that the tourist site can support without suffering the consequences of degradation.

Sustainable rural tourism consists of finding a correct harmony in the relationship between the visitor's needs, the place, and the host community. Nevertheless, tourism cannot be a totally sustainable activity. Due to its nature of mobility and consumption, it is unavoidable not to generate impacts on the environment, economy, and society of the LC visited, as shown in Table 6. Indeed, RT can generate positive impacts, such as the diversification of the local economy, providing complementary income to farmers, and promoting innovative economic initiatives with employment generation as a consequence. In this way, RT can reduce the rural exodus and revitalize the local culture and identity. At the environmental level, it enhances the conservation of natural resources, creating environmental awareness. It also promotes the reuse of ancient buildings as refurbished REs.

Unfortunately, RT is often seen as inherently sustainable for the small number of visitors that it attracts, for the limitation of the establishments, considering that it does not require extensive infrastructure, with the typical tourist being more flexible and interested in the local host community.

Spanish rural tourism is not always synonymous with sustainable tourism or tourism from quality as intended (Cànoves, 2004). It can generate negative impacts (Table 5), as the generation of inflation and price increases affect the LC and the living place. Consequently, it can cause social gentrification as occurred to the Chianti, in Tuscany. It also inherently generates pollution, waste, and noise that can affect environmental resources and alter faunae and flora's local habitats.

Thanks to a planning and managing plan, it is possible to prevent or mitigate the RT impacts to achieve the sustainable development of this activity, where the SMEs that form the tourism supply structure, the territory peculiarities, and the possible products have to be considered.

Public authorities have the central role of establishing regulation for the RT sector and elaborate criteria and indicators to be applied to the specific context of local development to evaluate the scale of application and distinguish between short-term and long-term objectives. For the sustainable development of the RT in Catalonia, the tourist commons managing (Briassoulis, 2020) has to consider the recourse's special and temporal availability in-time, as an over-used and mismanagement can reduce their attractiveness consequently the competitiveness of the RT destination. To avoid this situation, public institutions such as Generalitat, Catalan Tourism Board, the local DMO, local institutions such as the comarcas, provinces and city municipalities should regulate the tourism industry through tourism policies and regulation.

The management of the tourist commons should also consider the balance of interests between the LC and the users. They are mainly Catalan excursionists and tourists, and foreigners from urban centers with different backgrounds and consciousness. The LC often is constituted by a reduced rural population, which is recognized as an essential socio-cultural resource. The local SMEs that compose the RT supply are also counted as important LC actors, including the agro-cooperatives that can play a fundamental role as a promoter of local traditions, agricultural processes, and local food and landscape conservation.

Table 6 shows the main negative and positive impacts that rural tourism can generate at economic, socio-cultural, and environmental level.

Table 6 Rural Tourism Impacts in Catalonia. Own elaboration from Cànoves, 2006

Rural tourism impacts in Catalonia					
Economic		Socio-cultural		Environmental	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversifies rural economies, enhancing the service sector; - Generates new service demand for the LC and helps to create and infrastructure maintenance; - Promotes innovative activities; - Enhance local product and craft activities, - Generate new employment; - Provides complementary income to family economies; - Create opportunities for youth and women; - Rebalance the population structure of the LC; - Contributes to endogenous local development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creates precarious and low-quality job; - Contributes to perpetuate the role of women as caregivers of tourists; - Generates inflation and price increases in the LC and in the living place; - It is a seasonal activity and needs the complement of other income; - Introduces investments outside the community; - Can be placed outside the dynamics of the community; - No distributes benefits in a balanced way in LC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting return migrations and reduce rural exodus; - Recover and revitalize the local culture; - Strengthens the LC identity; - Enhances the self-esteem of the community and collective activities; - Helps with identification and knowledge of the place; - Provides opportunities for cultural exchange between local residents and newcomers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It can artificialize local culture; - It can alter the social balance of the LC; - It can generate social gentrification and awaken feelings of rejection to new residents; - It can generate a feeling of usurpation of identity and marginalization of the LC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contributes to the revitalization of the natural resources of the region; - Contributes to heritage and environmental awareness; - Enhance the protection of rural areas, preserving the biodiversity; - Enhances the environmental sensitivity of the local community - Enhances the maintenance of agricultural activity and landscape mosaics - Reuse old buildings and reduce construction crowds; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism generates pollution, waste and noise and light pollution; - Tourism consumes environmental resources and alters the local habitats of fauna and flora; - overexploitation of resources such as salinization of aquifers.

As Richie & Crunch (2000) explain, sustainability and competitiveness are interdependent, so the more the development is sustainable, the better are the conditions for the local firms that can experience a competitiveness increase towards a higher quality of the (RT) products and consequently raise their prices on the market.

The Catalan public bodies should seek towards the achievement of this management goal. RT in Catalonia is still far from this situation of competitiveness, and the SMEs are not obtaining the market power needed to activate this kind of mechanism. For this reason, RT in Spain and Catalonia cannot yet be considered fully sustainable due to the lack of regulation and harmonization of the functioning of the RT system.

RT also counts with an integrated approach lack, while the framework for policies' debate and decisions should be established and stimulates the collaboration between tourism stakeholders. In this sense, the collaboration between SMEs joined in agro-cooperatives, as in the cases of the Priorat, La Grandella o Aitona, allows the local RT enterprises to obtain a better market-power and offer a high-quality value. This agro-RT product is a sustainable example of redistribution of the tourist flows within the territory and the income within the LC. On the same line, innovative products such as 5Llacs and BoumortIndomit that, indeed, count on the joint efforts of the individual enterprises that have found in the collaboration the key towards a more sustainable RT development model.

Catalonia launched the Heritage Strategy natural and biodiversity of Catalonia 2030, which aims to analyze the actual status of agro-rural tourism in Catalonia to understand the tourist activity development in such areas before and post-COVID, and support its growth in the future.

Thanks to the European funds to recover from the pandemic impacts, the local GALs' purpose has been relaunched to promoter territorial network and good practices sharing. On the other hand, local entities and SMEs can count on those grants to support the rural areas' sustainable development and their RT products.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 What did you learn?

This work allows a deep comprehension of the rural tourism evolution in Catalonia and broadly in Spain and Europe, with insights from other member countries as Italy, France, and the UK. This tourism typology in rural spaces results in a phase of consolidation (Butler, 1980) in Catalonia, unlike to other cases that have already reached a mature stage, which serves as a trajectory sample for the Catalan region. Thanks to the pandemic, RT has experimented with growth in domestic demand, being the international market hindered by the mobility restrictions. As the statistical data show, REs have counted with an increasing occupancy in the last years. The renewed tourist demand trend interested in open-air activities, and contact with nature in a proximity context (Cañada, 2020) justifies this investigation on the opportunities and challenges that RT are currently facing together with the pre-Covid ones. Its trial role as a tool for the agriculture sector's diversification and the rural economy's enhancement, towards the traditional activities abandonment and the depopulation of the internal region (Cànoves, 2006). This call has been relaunched lately by the EU Commission to support the Countries' members in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, renewing its commitment with the new NEXTgeneration funds.

Indeed, the European Commission has played an essential role in improving living conditions in the more rural and internal zones since the end of XX, granting a series of aids (FEDER, LEADERs, etc) and programs (CAP, Long-Term vision for rural areas). In recent years, Catalonia has experienced some practical evolutions, also through the creation of GALs that have contributed to supporting some networking projects and helping with the successful investment of the public grants, as some city municipalities (Aitona, La Granadella, etc). Indeed, some initiatives, more often linked to RT, popped-up.

On the other hand, RT has historically been dared to redistribute the tourist flows from congested tourist destinations, like the coastline, to the rural area (Jiménez & Prats 2006). This goal can be achieved thanks to the more resilient proximity demand that can enhance a more sustainable development towards a critical change of the traditional Catalan tourism model.

The stress should be on enhancing the quality of the RT offer (Cànoves, et.al. 2004). To pursue this aim, good planning is needed. The local government should set legal and technical capacity to design, implement, and enforce planning solutions, promoting cooperation between stakeholders. Catalan public entities have made efforts in recent years, reviewing the political agenda towards more sustainable tourism shared on the territory and introducing new regulations to support the development of the RT supply. Still, results are not yet the hoped ones. The rural accommodations

and rural tourism enterprises sector still count with very heterogeneous establishment standards. The majority do not count with any certification, besides Catalonia's volunteer spike categorization established in 2008. Also, the scarce cooperativism or collaborative experiences do not allow RT to generate the demanded socio-economic impact within the territory and the local community. Due to that, RT cannot be considered fully competitive and sustainable (Ritchie and Crouch). To fill this gap, agro-cooperativism has been deemed adequate lateral coordination (Robbins & Barnwell) to improve the efficiency of rural enterprises. The joined efforts between the agriculture sector and tourism can indeed enhance RT's benefits in the internal areas. As emerged from case study development, some samples of this successful collaboration have developed in Catalonia, even if they did not generate the same accomplishment of the SMEs clusterization in Tuscany (Capone, 2006). In line with this comparison, in Tarragona, the cooperativism in the Priorat represents a contra case thanks to its eno-tourism development in recent years. Priorat winery region and its cooperatives have indeed generated a radical change towards a significant improvement of the socio-economic status of this region. At the beginning of the XX century, it was experiencing depopulation and abandonment of the land issue. Further analysis has focused on SMEs and agro-cooperative initiatives in the Lleida province, which represents the less developed in terms of RT products and benefits distribution from the statistical data.

The case studies have included Casa Leonardo (4 spikes RE) and Casa Rossa (sustainable self-efficient building), allowing a better comprehension of the good EU grants use and RT product characteristics. Both REs have launched collaborative social responsible RT initiatives - respectively, the 5 Llacs, a 5-days walking tour in Pallars, and BoumortIndomit, a new tourist cooperative - where the joined enterprises have designed high-quality RT products. The field-work case on La Granadella oil agro-cooperative and city council collaboration shows their efforts to relaunch the agricultural tradition and the oil as icon local product. The development of these RT projects counts with cultural, gastronomic, and active tourism products. This revalorization of the agricultural processes and landscapes and local food and cultural patrimonialization (Gascón, 2012) have had increasing success over the last years.

The outcomes of this work about RT structure in Catalonia show, in general, that the supply sector remains very heterogeneous at the quality and promotion level. The lack of a compulsory categorization system, the inadequate formation of tourism professionals, and the misunderstanding of authenticity and minimum comfort standards show the low competitiveness of the Catalan RT products (Cànoves, 2006), and consequently, poor sustainability in the long term.

As proposals to the Catalan public institutions, it strongly suggested stimulating the creation of networking and cooperative movements, with the high involvement of SMEs and the local community towards improving the RT quality and effects in Catalonia.

5.2 How do you answer to the RQs?

To conclude answering to the research questions, in Catalonia RT has made significant steps forward to consolidate the product, generating a diversification of the rural economy as supporting the agriculture sector through a revalorization of the agriculture process and food patrimonialization. But it is still considered a low-quality product due to the firm standards heterogeneity and lack of professionalism in the sector (Cànoves, 2006). It has generated extra incomes for the farmers, contrasting the depopulation phenomenon, but, it has not yet produced the long-awaited benefits on the socio-economic framework of the rural areas. Even with the efforts of the political agenda, Catalonia is still identified as a mass-tourism destination of mainly sun & beach tourism due to the low prices and antiquated infrastructures, especially along the Mediterranean coast, and in the Pyrenees region with mountain and active tourism, which increased after Covid-19.

In Catalonia, cooperativism has increased in the agricultural sector since the end of XX (Igual, 2002), while in the tourism industry represents an innovation in terms of RT supply structure configuration. Thanks to the literature review and the case studies, it emerged that agro-cooperativism linked to rural and gastronomy tourism has been increasing in recent years, but it did not reach a critical point yet to provoke a radical change in the (rural) tourism model.

Exception made in the case of eno-tourism in the Priorat, which followed the French winery cooperative model (Santos, 2018). It has been proposed as counterexample to underpin the strength of cooperativism, and in general, of joining efforts to produce a disruptive change in the rural socio-economic realities. In fact, in Priorat the depopulation issue is now getting stable. New residents have moved in, and new economic initiatives have been launched in favor of the economic diversification through the revaluation of the traditional agricultural processes and products projects, and innovative projects from other service sectors, like a library, restaurants, etc. Unfortunately, cooperative or collaborative experiences are still scarce and not harmonized between them. Due to this situation, agro-cooperativism in Catalonia is not yet generating the hoped socio-economic impacts within the territory to contrast the abandonment of the land or local agricultural activities. Worse, in some cases, as also Tuscany, RT tended to substitute those traditional activities, generating a loss of cultural heritage in the short term and a situation of unsustainability and consequently low competitiveness in the long term (Richie and Crouch 2003).

Public actors such as GALs and municipalities have promoted some rural (tourism) development initiatives and collaborated with the SMEs to apply the European funds. The RRN, through the GALs, aims to support the recovery from the pandemic and stimulate further improvement in the rural areas. It is also compromised to increase the networking and the share of best-practice to improve rural areas conditions, promoting the financial aid opportunities (Leaders, Proder, NextGeneration) and legal instruments at the regional and European level acknowledgment.

Covid-19 enhances the demand for activities in nature and proximity to local gastronomy, creating an ideal opportunity for RT to rise, counting on the recovery funds.

Once the crisis ends, it will not be affordable to return to travel levels experienced previously or to the traditional tourism model, mainly mass tourism in Catalonia and Spain. This is not only for the social unrest that over tourism provoked, but also due to the unsustainable environmental damages that tourism industry generates starting with climate change, pollution and resource depletion. It is essential to read this post pandemic moment as a chance to proactively plan for a voluntary mass-tourism degrowth in pursuit of post-capitalism (Fletcher, Murray, Blanco and at, 2020) in favor of a new alternative tourism model.

The recreation and holiday need that moves tourists can be in part satisfied by a well-organized national offer, reducing the mobility and provoking a new consciousness in the tourist demand in favor of the local. RT can then play a strategic role in this new scenario.

Public authorities should rethink tourism policy towards the tourism degrowth in ex-mass tourism destinations while supporting the sustainable development in some others as rural areas. The new governance needs to get aligned with the latest tourism demand and economic diversification needs (Cañada, E. 2020).

Following these needs, the Catalan political agenda should consider proximity rural tourism as a priority. Although initially, it would generate scarce income, it will be more resilient and sustainable in the long term also for climatic and social reasons. Once the RT is consolidated with a high-quality offer, income will rise and, consequently, the increase of benefits to be redistributed within the territory. To guide this process, strengthening public control mechanisms at different scales –fiscal, labor, urban development– over the operation and action of companies in the sector are needed. Also, the union organization in the sector, as cooperativism, is compulsory to strengthen the SMEs market power. It is necessary to rethink and promote a rural tourism policy thanks to the new tourism and economic situation created by the sanitary pandemic Covid19.

To make the big step towards a sustainable consolidation in rural areas, the RT planning should align with the EU's long-term vision for rural areas and plan coherent and homogeneous management of EU funds. To pursue this goal, RT stakeholders should establish a tourism policy to design a system of governance that makes possible the settlement of a solid sustainable alternative tourism model to achieve in the long-term the maximum benefits while minimizing the negative impacts.

This new RT destination model should ensure competitiveness in the long-term through a balance between quality-competitive intensity. For this goal achievement, institutional arrangements as quality certifications and quality brands should be created in favor of the sector's cohesion and complicity (Russo, 2009).

5.3 How do you use this knowledge?

This work will be shared with the interviewed RT stakeholders, as they are required. Hopefully, it will be used as a reflection for improvement and a better understanding of the rural tourism market in Catalonia. This knowledge can also serve as bench marketing for other RT destinations.

Thanks to the updated statistical data and cartography materials, scholars (and I) can use these outcomes as a starting point to elaborate integral planning and managing proposals for sustainable rural tourism development in agricultural areas in Catalonia.

The current post-Covid situation and the EU political agenda overview offer updated information supporting new research projects' design to investigate how EU grants can be used within the Community. Indeed, it can also stimulate a deeper examination of grant opportunities and enhance the launch of new socio-economic initiatives.

The successful RT products and enterprises examined, as tourism cooperatives and associations, can also be redesigned and readapted to other rural contexts. The lesson on how innovative enterprises' forms, based on collaborative efforts, can maximize benefits and reduce costs, delivering a better service, represents an important acknowledgment to be kept in mind when making working choices.

5.4 What you will do next?

This work elaboration has reminded me of the traditional rural activities' essentiality. Due to their productive function, food is the basis of our diet. On the other hand, the incredible socio-cultural heritage that they represent and that needs to be conserved to ensure sustainable development. Topics as food patrimonialization, and slow tourism inspired me a lot. I would like to keep examining the opportunities and challenges that tourism can generate in rural areas, opening the investigation to the potential gaps that may be present in my native region, Tuscany.

A comparative analysis of the RT development in different regions in the Mediterranean can be valuable to promote the exchange of good practices and through networking joining the efforts to stimulate the improvement of the life quality in the rural and interior areas.

I would like to apply for a PhD focus on valorizing the socio-cultural heritage of rural communities in Tuscany, Catalonia, and South America. The goals can be to highlight how these tourist destinations in a different life-cycle phase can influence each other to obtain an ideal model to be then applied to different contexts.

On the other hand, I will keep collaborating with Alba Sur, which is a stimulating space of idea exchange and great network to be in contact with professional of the sector.

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7. Annexes

Annex 1. List GALs (Local Action Groups) in Catalonia.

Source RNN webiste (last visit 16/08/2021)

Associació per al Desenvolupament Rural Integral de la zona Nord-Oriental de Catalunya – ADRINOC

Associació pel Desenvolupament Rural de la Catalunya Central

Associació per la Gestió del Programa Leader Ripollès Ges Bisaura

Consorci Leader Pirineu Occidental

Consorci Leader de Desenvolupament Rural del Camp

Consorci GAL Alt Urgell - Cerdanya

Associació Leader de Ponent

Consorci Grup d'Acció Local Noguera - Segrià Nord

Consorci Intercomarcal d'Iniciatives Socioeconòmiques Ribera d'Ebre – Terra Alta

Consorci per al Desenvolupament de la Catalunya Central

Consorci per al Desenvolupament del Baix Ebre i Montsià

Associació Grup d'Acció Local Pesquer Costa Brava

Annex 2. Tourist accommodations in Catalonia list 2020.

Source Agència Catalana de Turisme, last visit 14/08/2021

Tourist accommodations. 2020

Establishments and beds. By type. Counties and Aran, areas and provinces

Source: Idescat, based on data from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Families.

	Establishments				Beds			
	Hotel establishments	Campsites	Rural tourism	total	Hotel establishments	Campsites	Rural tourism	total
Alt Camp	6	0	58	64	408	0	484	892
Alt Empordor	229	33	152	414	14,932	31,187	1,309	47,428
Alt Penedès	24	0	94	118	748	0	768	1,516
Alt Urgell	42	8	95	145	1,485	2,625	638	4,748
Alta Ribagorça	46	5	73	124	1,804	1,08	425	3,309
Anoia	15	1	83	99	709	90	497	1,296
Aran	112	9	18	139	6,491	3,069	183	9,743
Bages	28	3	73	104	1,091	504	559	2,154
Baix Camp	70	17	41	128	11,819	22,629	362	34,81
Baix Ebre	35	4	50	89	2,847	4,119	316	7,282
Baix Empordor	205	43	111	359	15,745	59,318	967	76,03
Baix Llobregat	86	2	3	91	10,822	3,042	29	13,893
Baix Penedès	34	4	16	54	4,39	4,2	145	8,735
Barcelona	772	0	0	772	85,941	0	0	85,941
Berguedà	48	19	161	228	1,075	8,046	1,54	10,661
Cerdanya	61	7	63	131	3,234	4,524	470	8,228
Conca de Barberà	20	2	43	65	791	1,284	344	2,419
Garraf	67	6	4	77	5,489	8,526	47	14,062
Garrigues	7	0	8	15	92	0	65	157
Garrotxa	46	18	138	202	1,183	3,99	1,162	6,335
Girona	58	3	64	125	3,084	738	516	4,338
Maresme	161	30	24	215	32,654	18,876	197	51,727
Moianès	8	1	29	38	147	390	237	774
Montsià	33	5	31	69	1,554	2,4	291	4,245
Noguera	24	3	58	85	651	1,455	493	2,599
Osona	50	9	142	201	1,96	3,141	1,274	6,375
Pallars Jussà	18	5	60	83	707	1,794	503	3,004
Pallars Sobirà	59	22	100	181	2,834	7,842	687	11,363
Pla d'Urgell	7	0	12	19	217	0	115	332
Pla de l'Estany	15	3	107	125	403	1,623	879	2,905
Priorat	22	3	47	72	361	951	410	1,722
Ribera d'Ebre	16	2	25	43	434	333	165	932
Ripollès	67	14	145	226	2,471	4,947	1,031	8,449
Segarra	9	0	48	57	251	0	377	628
Segrià	32	1	8	41	2,848	111	68	3,027
Selva	249	27	66	342	43,627	20,905	647	65,179
Solsonès	25	6	126	157	695	2,319	853	3,867
Tarragonès	130	25	13	168	41,679	32,988	87	74,754
Terra Alta	17	3	30	50	590	561	254	1,405
Urgell	9	0	33	42	383	0	282	665
Vallès Occidental	54	0	3	57	6,435	0	30	6,465
Vallès Oriental	67	8	59	134	3,873	2,739	484	7,096
Catalonia	3,083	351	2,514	5,948	318,954	262,346	20,19	601,49
Metropolità	1,142	41	95	1,278	139,747	25,047	796	165,59
Comarques Gironines	869	141	783	1,793	81,445	122,708	6,511	210,664
Camp de Tarragona	248	47	202	497	55,058	57,852	1,687	114,597
Terres de l'Ebre	101	14	136	251	5,425	7,413	1,026	13,864
Ponent	88	4	167	259	4,442	1,566	1,4	7,408
Comarques Centrals	160	37	563	760	4,988	14,01	4,637	23,635
Alt Pirineu i Aran	338	56	409	803	16,555	20,934	2,906	40,395
Penedès	137	11	159	307	11,294	12,816	1,227	25,337
Barcelona	1,372	76	666	2,114	150,649	44,406	5,576	200,631
Girona	912	147	829	1,888	84,005	125,726	6,882	216,613
Lleida	416	63	665	1,144	19,427	22,749	4,874	47,05
Tarragona	383	65	354	802	64,873	69,465	2,858	137,196

Annex 3 Video-interview with Casa Rossa and BoumortIndomit founder

19/08/2021

Os definís como una organización cooperativa que reúne pequeños proyectos y opera en ecoturismo sostenible. ¿En qué momento decidisteis montar una cooperativa y por qué?

¿Cuáles han sido las ventajas que habéis experimentado con la formación de la cooperativa?

Xavi: Cooperativa se ve constituida por 3 actividades: Can Rossa, gestionada por Xavi y Urgell, una estructura eco-sostenible que ofrece servicio de alojamiento; Albert con su actividad de guía y naturistologo Salvatgines y el Refugi de Cuberes que ofrece servicio de alojamiento en el refugio de montaña y cocina, gestionado por Gabi.

La cooperativa vende un producto constituido por la suma de estas tres actividades.

Hasta este momento estaban vendiendo productos a través de agencias intermediarias o directamente como privados.

Xavi : Ya había colaboración previa entre las tres actividades. Boumort es un referente en fauna entonces ya había muchos clientes que contactan al Albert para salir de excursiones, mientras otros buscaban lugares para la comida entonces se iban al refugio de Gabi o, en caso de grupos grandes, viene directamente Gabi.

Urgell : La colaboración en sí ya estaba hace años pero el hecho de unirse y constituir una cooperativa ha sido para poder atraer financiación porque había un proyecto que era para cooperativa.

A raíz del “Proyecto Singulares” presentamos una propuesta. Nos dieron financiación de 60.000€ para que podamos trabajar durante un año en formar un proyecto. Ahi si nos constituimos como cooperativas, cada una de las tres partes tiene una persona contratada por la cooperativa más una persona encargada de comunicación que era externa y de donde hacemos el diseño de todos los productos ecoturísticos que contienen las tres patas - actividades guiadas, transporte, alojamiento y la manutención - que es frutos de esta experiencias muy puntuales que teníamos. La voluntad de ponerlas en unos paquetes, hacer una web, unos videos y plantear vender todo esto: osea hacer un catálogo para la comercialización.

Ahora y a la hora de mirar al futuro el proyecto es super cooperativo, pero en el momento que se escogió formar la cooperativa ha sido porque una ente público ha pensado que era la mejor forma de tirar proyectos adelante y por qué es una fórmula muy interesante porque “no está solo” si los tres creen que una cosa va a funcionar es más difícil que los tres se equivoquen que sólo uno. Además si uno se tropieza los otros lo pueden levantar.

Xavi: como ha dicho Urgell aunque al principio no lo teníamos en mente, el tema de ser una cooperativa lo que busca no es un beneficio empresarial sino únicamente que sea sostenible. La

cooperativa por cada servicio de los socios paga a los socios, aquí los socios aplican sus beneficios. Estos se reinvierten en proyectos para el territorio, que esto es también interesante porque seguramente una organización que no fuese cooperativa, si o un autónomo, esto tema no lo tiene muy en mente; en cambio nosotros sí hemos acordado que con parte de los beneficios ya hay proyectos en cartera para desarrollar que prevén inversiones a nivel medioambiental, cultural y social.

Por ejemplo ahora hemos arreglado un camino en Boumort o se editó un libro sobre la historia de Boumort.

Boumort se encuentra en el Prepirineu català. ¿Colaboráis o habéis sido patrocinados por algún GAL? ¿O soportados por algún GAL de algunas formas, con iniciativas, consultorías etc.?

Urgell. No, la cooperativa no ha recibido ningún apoyo de parte de GAL.

El proyecto era uno de subvenciones de la Generalitat, que lo gestionan por territorio. En este caso era un Projecte Singulars del Departamento de Treball, Fer Socials i cooperativa, no se que titulo más largo tenía, ya lo han cambiado.

Lo que tenía en cuenta esta subvención cuando nosotros en el 2019 la cojimos, que ahora ya no, era la distribución territorial. No competía con los proyectos de toda Catalunya, con los cuales nosotros del Pirineos siempre nos quedamos atrás por un simple hecho de población: somos solo el 1% de toda la población, así que probabilidades y magnitud de los proyectos es fácil que quedemos fuera. Esto sí que tenía en cuenta el tema territorial a la hora de dar los proyectos.

En ningún momento habéis tomado contactos con el GA local de vuestra comarca?

Urgell: No. En nuestra comarca el GAL es GAL Alt Urgell - Cerdanya, esto gestiona los LEADERS, pero ellos trabajan con proyectos de inversión. Este es un proyecto de ejecución y gestion, éste pagaba sueldo, mientras el proyecto leader paga sólo un 10%.

En Can Rossa si hemos tenido 3 proyectos LEADERS para desarrollo de la casa.

¿Participáis en algún proyecto a nivel de Comunidad Autónoma? ¿Qué relación tenéis con el RRN o su antena en Catalunya?

Xavi: Si, sencillamente nos conectaron para participar en la mesa redonda para presentar el proyecto. Ojalá haya algo!

Urgell: Aunque simplemente conocernos y que nos puedan explicar qué hacen y nosotros explicarles qué hacemos. Porque si se trata de temas rurales seguro tienen cosas interesantes. Nos estamos apuntando un poco a todo. Primero yo me he apuntado a un tema de "Mujeres rurales emprendedoras" y fuimos a presentar el proyecto a Maribel, que es una profesora de la escuela agraria del Pallars y estaba también Mireia de Casa Leonardo, ellas nos eligieron y estuvieron

haciéndonos un acompañamiento, un “Mentoraje”, en el proyecto para ayudarnos a diseñar y demás. Maribel, a raíz de esto, yo creo que a ella le preguntaron gente para explicar nuevos proyectos y nos apuntaron en la jornada de mesa redonda.

Todos los contactos de tiene Indomit lo tiene por iniciativas propia, no estamos en ninguna red de proyecto no porque no nos interese sino porque no conocemos un lugar donde estar en contacto con otros proyectos.

Además los GALs son públicos, son administración. Indomit con los Gals ha tenido 0 relación ni la va a tener porque los GALs gestionan a los fondos Leaders que adjudican a privados y luego sus propios proyectos cooperativos entre Gals, por ejemplo el Odisea, Pirinova, pero con una entidad que recibe ningún proyecto Leader no colaboran.

El ARCA también es público y un privado con ellos no pinta nada.

Yo no sé, igual organizan alguna jornada. Yo sé que existe ARCA y los GALs porque yo antes formaba parte de un Comité técnico de un Leaders, por eso sé que son. Si les preguntas a los otros socios tampoco saben que son. Díselo a ARCA “oye cómo es que no tenéis nada de colaboración con los privados!”

A nivel de forma de financiación. ¿Habéis contado con alguna financiación pública?

Si la del proyecto Singlars, nada más de momento.

También con el soporte del mentoraje “Mujeres rurales” tenido por mujeres emprendedoras del Pallars, donde la gerente nos ha ayudado a diseñar productos con experiencias, ellas son mujeres con muchas experiencias y conocimientos en desarrollo y turismo rural.

Habláis de economía social. ¿Qué quiere decir en práctica por la vuestra cooperativa? ¿Cómo controláis el impacto medioambiental y social?

Urgell:

En nuestro territorio viven 20 personas. Es un territorio muerto. Nuestros padres se fueron de jóvenes del pueblo y nuestro objetivo y obsesión es generar desarrollo: generar empleo, ocupación, generar un futuro sostenible para el territorio.

El hecho de crear la cooperativa, como decía Xavi, no tiene ningún fin lucrativo. Cada uno de nosotros tiene su trabajo, pero si dedicamos tiempo para el desarrollo local.

Nuestra obsesión es generar las suficientes actividades económicas en el territorio para poder atraer personas que vuelvan.

La casa rural, Casa Rossa, la verdad son 4 años que funciona y estamos alucinando de como va porque desde el primer momento ha tirado mucho, muchísimo más de lo que esperábamos. Vimos

que sólo con la casa no generamos mucha demanda, mientras consideramos que a través de la cooperativa el mirar de crear actividades económicas sería capaz, en el futuro, de atraer gente al territorio.

A nivel social somos super poquitos, pero desde el primer momento que planteamos hacer una cooperativa se lo contamos a todo el mundo. Hemos hecho presentaciones públicas para que vengan todos los de pueblos, para que conozcan.

A nivel de desplazamiento, la idea es que las personas que compren los productos de Indomit, se las va a buscar no suben con su coche. Son un grupo max 8 personas.

La mayor parte de las excursiones se hacen a pié y sino en un vehículo donde pueden caber todos. Luego todo el tema de alimentación va con la elección de productos del territorio. Evidentemente habrá café o productos no de aquí pero miraremos que sean de comercio justo, envueltos reciclables y eso. Evidentemente en un mundo insostenible, podemos decir que somos lo más sostenible, pero sí que tratamos de ser los más sostenibles que podamos.

Un dato interesante a tener en cuenta en qué Can Rossa, está a 1500 m altura las temperaturas externas de Septiembre a Junio llegan a ser muy bajas, pero es una casa que funciona sin calefacción. Aparte de los paneles solares que nos sirven para el agua caliente, el sistema constructivo de la casa está hecho con madera de los bosques del Pirineo con lo cual el impacto a nivel de CO2 desde su lugar a la casa ha sido mínimo.

La casa está hecha con criterio *passive house*, financiado en parte por los Leaders. La casa es estancia y está de cara al sur y aprovecha el sol todo el día. El 15 de Enero puede estar a 22 grados.

La estancia en Can Rossa no es 100% sostenible, pero la manera de hacer turismo si es de lo más sostenible de lo que pueda haber.

¿Cómo financiaron la construcción de la Casa Rossa?

Urgell: Tuvimos ayuda Leader. Ahora hemos pedido otra, la tercera para alargar la casa.

En su momento re-usamos: nosotros trabajamos las vigas antiguas y con estas hicimos los muebles. Además si tiene jacuzzi, pero está hecho en Catalunya, el sauna vino de Murcia. Intentamos que todos fuesen lo más próximos y lo más sostenible.

Sobre productos locales. ¿Colaboráis directamente con algún agricultor/campesino de la zona?

¿Tenéis pensado desarrollar o soportar de alguna forma proyectos de agricultura?

Urgell: En el pueblo, en Taus, hay un ganadero y tenemos la suerte que tiene producción de ternera ecológica y evidentemente toda la carne de ella es de ellos.

Por las verduras y frutas tenemos que dirigirnos a otras familias y Gabi también compra de los

agricultores del valle o en Gerri de la Sal que es el pueblo más grande que hay cerca del refugio. Pero si tratamos que todo sea de proximidad.

Quesos, vinos, galletas son del valle o del Pallars, leche, mermelada y embutidos son del territorio. No vamos a poner pescado o atún, la gente que coma pescado en su casa.

Si no puede ser de proximidad, que sea por lo menos ecológico.

Si los turistas quieren comprar algo, les ponemos en contacto con productores o con el restaurante que vende casa.

¿Habéis pensado en medidas de generación de empleo para las mujeres o jóvenes?

Urgell: Nuestro objetivo es generar actividades que atraigan a gente y poder repoblar la zona, que se está quedando despoblada. Queremos generar empleo y volver a poblar el territorio.

Boumort y sus alrededores han pasado por una temporada de abandono de las tierras. ¿En qué época? ¿Cuál ha sido la evolución socio-económica en el área?

Urgell: Entre los años 60-70 se vació el pueblo. Al principio del siglo XX vivían igual más de 300 personas. Ahora vivimos en poquísimo, son unos 8 lo del pueblo, todos nos hemos ido a trabajar hacia lo más urbano.

¿Vosotros desde cuándo estáis trabajando en turismo?

Urgell: Desde el 2017, lo tuvimos como un hobby y para perseguir el objetivo de desarrollo local, osea trabajamos en turismo porque trabajamos en este tipo de turismo allí y según estas condiciones. Si nos hubiesen ofrecido gestionar un hotel, no está claro. Turismo no es nuestra pasión el objetivo era el desarrollo local.

¿Cómo habéis pasado estos 4 años en turismo y cómo os ha afectado la pandemia de Covid?

¿Habéis notado algún cambio en término de llegadas, tipologías de clientes, estancia, temporada baja/alta?

Xavi: Ha sido bastante preocupante porqué cuando hemos tenido que cerrar, hemos tenido que cerrar. Pero como nos han dejado movernos si que el turismo rural ha subido mucho.

En los veranos si hemos visto un aumento en las reservas.

Nosotros, como Can Rossa, lo que notamos muchos es que empezamos a ser independientes de las grandes operadoras como Booking.com. Ahora casi el 90% de las reservas viene de nuestra web. En Boumort Indomit, acabamos de empezar pero si la gente empieza a tener interés y quería productos ya; mientras nosotros ofrecemos productos desde Abril hasta final de julio porque son

productos de alta calidad y no queremos que haya mucha gente. El objetivo es desestacionalizar y en Agosto ya hay mucho trabajo y no queremos ofrecerlos.

Queremos guardar estos clientes para hacer calendario al 2022 y vender productos como los tenemos en la web. Va a ser una cosa que va a costar bastante, ya que no son productos baratos.

¿Cuál es el mercado al que se dirige Boumort Indomit?

Xavi: Un día la persona sale a 120E o así pero entendemos que hay público que busca este tipo de producto y que tiene el poder adquisitivo y unos valores que lo llevan a elegir estos productos.

La gran incógnita es cómo venderlos, estamos en contacto con agencias, mirando a Google Ads, marketing digital, que nos permita llegar al público objetivo potenciales compradores de nuestros productos.

Entiendo que la gama de visitantes hasta ahora ha sido demanda doméstica con poder adquisitivo medio-alto y ahora queréis dirigiros a una gama superior con mayor poder adquisitivo?

Xavi: Es un producto todo incluido y vale dinero; pero quién va a Disneyworld se lo va a gastar. Es buscar el público que tiene unos valores para los cuales elija ir a descubrir naturaleza por 5 días. Nosotros aquí somos muy inexpertos.

El público es más de mercados europeos: franceses, ingleses, alemanes, escandinavos. Quizás americanos también pero no nos convence el viaje en avión.

Miramos a que los visitantes lleguen en transporte público, en tren.

Estos productos se venden pocos al consumidor más local. La gente organiza sus cosas, en cambio el público extranjero ve las actividades guiadas cómo necesarias para conocerlas a fondo. Incluso los productos de fauna están hasta 1400-500 pero son cosas que no se hacen cada día y que un día se lo puede permitir mucha gente. Te hace un safari interno ya que los vuelos internacionales van a salir de precio.

Urgell: “Lo que puede visitar en Boumort si que es virgen y auténtico. Un ciervo que vale como un león.”

En su momento pensamos en un proyecto de compensación de CO2, pero plantar un árbol en el Pirineo no tiene sentido. Hay estos proyectos, pero nosotros rápidamente decidimos hacer “retorno al territorio” a través de la recuperación del camino o como puede ser un libro que es un cuento, que uno de los productos de base en este cuento. Proyectos que ponen en valor el patrimonio material o inmaterial.

Con lo que hay de emisiones no nos compensa plantar árboles, en el Pirineo ya hay demasiados.

¿Cómo es percibido el turismo por parte de los pobladores de Boumort?

Xavi: La verdad super bien, estaba tan muerto el territorio que la idea que pueda venir gente los ha emocionado. Hay algunos que siempre tratan de hablar con los visitantes.

También nosotros somos de ahí, nuestros padres eran de ahí y íbamos todo los fin de semanas desde pequeño. Alguien de fuera, alguien que viene de la urbanización, no hubiera tampoco podido aterrizar mucho.

La percepción desde el principio era de que estaba muy bien, pero todos pensaban que no iba a venir nadie. Si pensábamos que con la gente que subiría amortizáramos algo, íbamos equivocados.

Urgell: Este era un sentimiento general, pero no iba a venir ni el pato. Porque si la gente de aquí nos hemos ido a vivir fuera como va a venir de turismo, ellos se van a playa o a otro sitio. Ahí si quedamos todos alucinados, por la cantidad de gente que hemos recibido, también jóvenes.

Igual tratamos de seleccionar el perfil de los clientes. Antes de alquilar la casa, si hay jóvenes advertimos a los vecinos de al lado, para que no se asusten y tengan paciencia, y super majos. Pero si no le dice esto, en lugar de verlo en positivo que lo ven, se hubieran quejado. Los inputs que tenemos de los vecinos son de momento super bien.

¿Por ejemplo ellos participan en algunas actividades o están involucrados de alguna forma en la cooperativa?

Xavi: Si en uno de los “productos por familia” que Indomit va a tener, incluye la visita a la ganadera. Además cuando se hacen calendarios de actividades en el pueblo, ofrecemos un viajes gratis para todo el mundo Esto a la gente le gusta mucho y es muy positivo. El último año que lo propusimos, antes del Covid, con el guía era muy interesante porque se veía el ambientólogo, que es de ahí por lo tanto conoce muy bien el territorio, pero incluso con la gente local de ahí, ellos le indicaban los usos de las plantas locales locales. Se veía el saber popular de los vecinos mezclado con los conocimientos técnicos del guía.

Urgell: De hecho pensábamos que la gente no se iba a apuntar, mientras siempre hubo mucha gente por los conocimientos del ambientólogo que le podía contar cosas que no sabía o dar la explicación técnica. Por ejemplo, me acuerdo que había una planta que decían que cuando le dolía la muela la mordían y tal, y él le contaba que la planta era un opiáceo y que calmaba.

Annex 4 In-deep interview to city council member of La Granadella, Lleida

21/08/2021

La cooperativa se inauguró en 1920.

¿Sabes por qué han elegido formar una cooperativa?

Si, actualmente nació de un proyecto conjunto cooperativa-ayuntamiento, colaborando por el museo del aceite.

La cooperativa cedió el molino antiguo al ayuntamiento por muchos años y con esta cesión el ayuntamiento pidió una ayuda con un FEDER para rehabilitar el molino, de ahí se musealizó y ahora hay una comisión de trabajo de gestión conjunta cooperativa-ayuntamiento. que se están trabajando juntos.

La cooperativa si nació en el año '20, por que en ese año en Catalunya hubo la "Mancomunitat de Catalunya" que es un organismo que agrupaba las 4 provincias y en el año '20 promovió mucho el cooperativismo por eso muchas cooperativas catalanas tienen cien años.

¿Cómo ha cambiado el paisaje y la forma de trabajar en los últimos años hasta hoy en día?

El principal cambio se dio hace aproximadamente de unos 20 años cuando aquí se introdujo el regadío. En esta zona se encuentra "una regadío de soporte" por voto; esto es lo que ha permitido asegurar la cosecha (agua desde el ebre) ya que había mucha sequías que perjudicaban mucho. Es de hecho el principal problema para el cultivo, junto a las heladas.

Llevar el agua con bombeo desde el Ebro y han conseguido asegurar la cosecha, a pesar que el agua sea muy cara, y además que cada vez haya más incorporaciones de jóvenes a la agricultura. Que Catalunya es de las regiones con menos gente dedicada a la agricultura pero por que no es rentable, piensa que la población agraria es un 1-2%, que es poquísimo. Sube si tomamos en cuenta la población agroindustrial.

¿Ha habido un aumento de los agricultores en La Pobla?

Después del regadío se ha evitado pérdida de agricultores, porque en la zonas donde no lo hay cada vez menos agricultores. Por lo menos aquí se mantiene.

¿Colaboran con otras cooperativas de la zona?

La cooperativa La Granadella me consta que forma parte de la Federación de cooperativas de Catalunya, como socia. Ahora cerca del establecimiento se está haciendo un molino nuevo y van a hacer una fusión de las cooperativas, La Granadella y la de Torrebesses que es un municipio vecino. En la zona de Les Garrigues hay una denominación de origen con el mismo nombre, pero

desafortunadamente el 50% de la producción está fuera de la denominación de origen y esto es un punto débil que tiene la zona.

**Sigue siendo la agricultura de las aceitunas y almendras la mayor fuente de ingreso del pueblo? Si
¿Cuándo habéis decidido lanzar actividades turísticas cómo el centro de la cultura del Oli y museo?
¿Por qué?**

Esto empezó hace 10 años. De hecho cuando nosotros empezamos con el oleoturismo en Catalunya eramos los pioneros de la comunitat, mientras ya estaba desarrollado el enoturismo pero el oleoturismo era muy incipiente.

Lo primero que hizo el ayuntamiento, que había tomado en cargo el convento que se estaba por caer, fue pedir una ayuda LEADER que obtuvo. Con esa restauró la estructura y se le puso el nombre “Centro de la cultura del aceite de Catalunya” de forma de asegurarse el nombre, así que no lo puede tener nadie más y también por una cuestión de prestigio.

Hay un programa anual de actividades, no es solo un centro turístico sino que también un centro cultural. Por el oleoturismo nos inspiramos en el enoturismo, ya que estaba más desarrollado, y nos dimos cuenta que si todo el mundo hace lo mismo es muy homogéneo; entonces desde el minuto cero nos dimos cuenta que necesitábamos especializarnos.

Apostamos entonces para vincular el oleoturismo con el arte y de hecho algunos centros nos están intentando copiar.

¿Qué actividades tenemos? Por ejemplo, a lado de la cooperativa entrando al municipio hay un mural hecho por Lily Brik, que es una muralista famosa de Lleida e hizo este mural vinculado a la producción e historia del aceite.

Además, tenemos un plan trimestral de actividades donde vinculamos tres ejes: arte, gastronomía y salud, con un doble objetivo, el primero es (1) atraer turistas y 2) dar un valor añadido al aceite: si la gente se tiene que venir en cubas le haces un precio de commodity. Así que le tiene que poner marca, marketing, vincúlas el producto con el paisaje y con las personas que lo trabajan, le das un mayor valor. Así que lo vende más, más ingresos tiene la cooperativa y más ingresos tienen los agricultores y evita la despoblación.

De hecho, detrás, eso ha tenido una evolución económica gracias al turismo y el objetivo es revertir el despoblamiento. Para nosotros el objetivo en sí no es el turismo, sino que es un medio para fijar la población al territorio.

Entre las actividades que tenemos son: actividades gastronómicas; en el centro del aceite hacemos presentaciones de producto(aceite, vino, mermeladas, miel etc).

Además tenemos un proyecto educativo con escuelas y durante el año vienen escuelas a hacer los talleres. Por ejemplo lo que tiene más éxito es lo que se llama “Agricultor por un día” y se hace en

cosecha: los niños cosechan sus aceitunas, los llevan al centro para hacer el aceite y se llevan el mismo. Es una actividad al aire libre y sobre todo a los de las ciudades les gusta mucho.

Hacemos también actividades con la piedra en seco porque la característica principal del paisaje de nuestra zona es un paisaje ondulado, entonces los agricultores para ganar tierras hacían un abancalar y utilizaban piedras para hacer márgenes.

Nosotros, juntos con la Universidad de Lleida, una vez al año hacemos un taller de recuperación de margen de piedra seca y haciendo también formación para que la gente se capacita a recuperar sus márgenes en colaboración con el centro de interpretación de la piedra seca, de Torrebesses.

Además hacemos presentaciones de libros vinculados con la cultura del aceite en un sentido amplio.

Una actividad que está teniendo mucha repercusión es OliverArt, unos premios que sacamos a diciembre de cada año y tiene 2 modalidades: unas exposiciones temporales (a pago) de proyectos inéditos [...], la segunda es el “Paseo escultórico” en el Mirador de les Terres del Ebre, cada año seleccionamos dos obras que, muchas veces promovida por el LANDart, proyectos de arte vinculado a la naturaleza. en conjunto hacemos presentación de productos gastronómicos, cata de vino y de aceite; siempre intentamos vincular los productos de la tierra con todo el arte.

Tenemos dos rutas también una va hacia el nord, hacia el altiplano por el que se ven los Pirineos, y otro que va hacia el Sur se ven las tierras del Ebro, hasta Tortosa cuando hay buenas condiciones climáticas.

También estamos “NATURA LOCAL” es una web donde se promocionan rutas rurales. Nosotros tenemos 4 rutas que se pueden descargar en el móvil para auto-guiarse y así se evita también poner señalización, que para mí quiere decir evitar de intervenir en el paisaje y artificializar-le. Son 4 rutas [...] una ligada a la guerra civil y 3 ligadas a la naturaleza local.

Tenemos también “Buricletas”: ruta de bici con bici eléctricas que tienen un GPS y cuando está en un sitio de interés desde la App se escucha el sonido del burro así que puede parar y seguir la historia guiada sobre el lugar.

En el Centro Aceite hacemos también actividad de formación: en gestión de molinos y aceite, a través de una colaboración con el municipio de Borges Blanques, y otra, una vez al mes, tenemos un Club de catas para profesionales (gente que trabaja en molinos privados, en restaurantes, en cooperativas, agricultores, casas rurales, en turismo...).

Este Club ha empujado nuevas iniciativas, por ejemplo agricultores se han hecho marca propia de aceite, carta de aceite en los restaurantes, empresas de turismo que han incluido ruta de aceite en sus productos etc.

Supongo que fue una elección pública del ayuntamiento. ¿Habéis seguido direcciones por la Generalitat o el gobierno nacional?

Todo ha sido por trabajo del ayuntamiento.

Aquí en La Granadella tenemos varios parques eólicos, estos dejaron y deja un dinero al ayuntamiento, que ha decidido destinarlo a proyectos de promoción económica.

¿Habéis contado con inversiones públicas europeas nacionales o comarcales? ¿Habéis tenido financiación Leaders o Proter?

Con el Leader, ayuda europea, se ha financiado la restauración del convento donde hay el Centro del Aceite. El museo también se ha financiado con ayuda europea Leaders, que no llega de la nada: es el ayuntamiento el que tiene que estar pendiente de las convocatorias, prepararla, avalar el proyecto.

El museo está en el MNACTEC, Museo nacional de la Ciencia de Catalunya, una red de museos territoriales que tiene muchos museos industriales por todo Cataluña. Nosotros somos la subsección dedicada al aceite [...]

¿Sabes que es un Grupo de Acción Local? Colaboráis con algún?

Sí, en la zona de Lleida hay el grupo de acción que se llama Associació Leader de Ponent, y colaboramos con ellos. Por ejemplo, hace unos 4 meses nos ha salido una ayuda del Leader también para poner placas fotovoltaicas de autoconsumo que vamos a poner en todo los parques municipales, para evitar emisión de CO2 y la electricidad será propia del ayuntamiento.

Os encontráis en la provincia de Lleida. A nivel provincial habéis tenido alguna indicaciones sobre el desarrollo rural? Turístico?

No, más ha sido la actividad del ayuntamiento.

Hace unos años igual el Consejo comarcal de les Garrigas tiene un departamento de Turismo que se ha enfocado en el oleoturismo, cada vez hay más iniciativas comarcales sobre estos aspectos. A nivel provincial hay el Patronato de turismo de Lleida que desde hace solo un par de años ha iniciado a promocionar el oleoturismo.

También la Generalidad de Catalunya desde hace unos 5-6 años ha empezado a apostar por el oleoturismo. Tiene unos grupos de trabajo, uno que se llama “Experiencia gastronómica” que también trabaja el oleoturismo. Nosotros hacemos partes, ellos organizan viaje de prospección a otros territorios, por ejemplo la primera hace 3-4 años fue a Italia, yo estuve, y fue en Italia, en Lombardía, cerca del Lago de Garda. Después fue a Andalucía, a Jaén, donde también están

apostando mucho en los últimos años (4-5) por el oleoturismo. La diferencia es que Jaén tiene el soporte de la Diputación de Jaén, considera que son el principal productor mundial de aceite. Nosotros, en Lérida, las Garrigues es la comarca que más aceite produce, pero en el territorio de Lleida hay de todo, no solo aceite, ni es el principal producto de Catalunya.

¿Cuál es la relación de la cooperativa con la actividad turística? Además del museo, hay otras actividades o lugar de visitas?

Principalmente es el museo. También hacemos doe eventos vinculado con la cultura del aceite: el primero es OLEATERRA, en primavera, y son 2-4 actividades artísticas en espacios singulares por ejemplo en un campo de olivos, en una balmes (cueva en la montaña), en las iglesias [...] hacemos un concierto de música, de teatro, performance artísticas en espacios singulares siempre favoreciendo el vínculo - Arte y gastronomía, acompañas con actividad gastronómica como la cata de un vino o de un aceite.

Además, en la primera semana de Noviembre se hace la Feria de aceite llamada “La primera prensada, aceite, arte y gastronomía”[...] con crios, artistas con premios, las estatuas que se subastan con retorno social.

Organizamos jornadas técnica del sector de aceite, jornadas de marketing, los que puedan necesitar los actores del sector.

También organizamos un “Forum vergi extra”: un forum de debate del sector del aceite y del oleoturismo - con profesionales nacionales e internacionales que llevamos a conocer la zona, con sus productos y sitios de interés turísticos; se hacen catas con debate para ir mejorando sobre la calidad del aceite, de la oferta turística, de gastronomía, y así.

¿Habéis entonces logrado estimular la creación de redes o colaboraciones entre las PMEs?

Si, cada vez más. Gracias a las diferentes actividades.

Además una red informal que tenemos es lo que comentaba de la Red que se ha formado con el CLUB De Cata de Aceite - restauradores, agricultores, profesionales se conocen y colaboran entre ellos.

Además, el ayuntamiento hace tiempo ha estado impulsando una “red catalana de oleoturismo” con gente de diferentes comarcas. Hacemos reuniones periódicas, mínimo 1 vez al año, a nivel descentralizado cada vez en un territorio diferente. También se ha invitado las administraciones y la Generalitat, es a nivel Catalunya. De momento estamos a la tercera edición però la hicimos virtual debido al Covid.

Gracias a este forum han salido proyectos europeos desde el punto de vista catalán.

¿Cómo los agricultores y la gente del pueblo percibieron la idea de activar turismo aquí?

Al principio eran bastante escépticos y siguieron la corriente del ayuntamiento, pero cada vez están más vinculados. Ahora si somos realistas, la cooperativa está super 100% implicada.

El turismo es una estrategia de marketing muy fuerte, las actividades, ferias y eventos, escritores, lo que hacemos tienen muchas repercusiones gracias a las rondas de prensa, los medios sociales.

Desde cuándo creasteis el centro y el museo del Oli y lanzaron las actividades ha aumentado la presencia turística en la zona?

No, fuerte no porque esta no es una zona turística, pero ha habido una mejora, poco a poco. Como mínimo un cambio de tendencia, antes no venía nadie ahora cada vez más va a venir más gente. Aunque difícil de contabilizar .

Cómo se estructura la demanda turística: quién son los visitantes, proveniencia, edad. ¿Son más excursionistas o turistas que se quedan a dormir por la zona?

Viene un público familiar catalán, muy poco extranjeros pero cada vez viene más.

Es muy difícil construir turismo desde cero. Por ejemplo, el oleoturismo en la zona del Empordá es más fácil por la cercanía a la costa y los turistas pueden hacer un poco de todo.

Poco se quedan, un punto débil que hay aquí es que hay muy pocos alojamientos.

El ayuntamiento tiene pensado abrir un hostel de Jovani, porque hay falta de alojamientos.

¿Hay casas rurales, agroturismo etc? ¿Cómo evalúa la oferta de alojamiento de la zona?

Están empezando, hay pocas pero están empezando.

Desde hace unos años ha cambiado la normativa para los alojamientos turísticos, antes lo que regulaba el turismo rural era mucho más complejo, ahora con esta ley mucha más flexible están empezando y cada vez hay más casas rurales.

¿Cómo os ha afectado la pandemia a nivel económico y social? ¿Hubo un aumento de turistas como ha pasado en el Priorat?

Debido al Covid ha habido un bajado de las visitas. Contamos con que se recupere pronto.

La ventaja es el turismo al aire libre, pero nosotros estamos igual empezando a nivel del municipio y del territorio.

Aún no estamos tan maduros como Priorat.

¿Hay proyectos de inclusión social de jóvenes y mujeres en el ámbito agrícola y turístico promovido por entes públicos?

La mayoría en el oleoturismo son jóvenes, mientras en la agricultura no, ya tienen una edad. Además, estamos haciendo talleres del centro de formación.

En el turismo el 80% son mujeres turismo, el 80% en la agricultura son hombres.

¿El ayuntamiento ya puede contar con beneficios debido al turismo? ¿De qué tipo?

¿Cuáles son las líneas a futuro para el desarrollo agro turístico?

Esto es muy difícil de contabilizar.

Por otro lado, la cooperativa está asumiendo gente con formación en turismo para dar una imposición más fuerte al binomio agricultura turismo.

También cada vez más, las empresas privadas están vinculando el aceite y el oleoturismo. Hubo un cambio de tendencia importante en eso, que está en proceso.

Cómo ayuntamiento hemos puesto en marcha la construcción de un albergue juvenil justo cerca de la cooperativa, con unas 18 plazas, que en la segunda fase tendría que pasar a ser 30.

Annex 5. Video-interview Casa Leonardo owner and manager.

20/08/2021

1 Casa Leonardo cuenta con una larga historia. ¿Desde cuándo has vuelto a abrir la casa hubo muchos cambios hacia la sostenibilidad con la ganancia de diferentes premios, me puedes contar un poco más sobre tu trabajo?

Casa Leonardo es una antigua posada del abuelo que se cerró en 1977. Entonces yo lo volví a abrir en el 2001, hace 20 años, como casa de turismo rural.

Yo soy arqueóloga y tengo una pasión por lo que es patrimonio: natural, cultural, gastronómico y tal y ya tuve claro que tenía que poner todo este patrimonio de nuestro territorio en todos los sitios.

Por ejemplo, lo que hice es musealizar la casa explicando esta historia del último siglo que ha cambiado tanto la historia, y cómo la gente de la ciudad que no ha podido guardar muchas cosas podía recordar su infancia.

Otra placa me veía comprometida con mis productores; yo me dedico al turismo y vivo de mí paisaje: la gente no viene a mi casa si no llega a disfrutar de esta naturaleza. Este paisaje está en mano a una gente que lo cuida: los agricultores, los ganaderos.. y por eso tuve claro que yo tenía que poner los máximo de productos locales en mí comidas y artesanía con el objetivo de dinamizar al máximo esta economía local.

Además invito a los visitantes a visitar sus explotaciones o incluso vender sus productos, sobre todo los domingos cuando ellos están cerrado, no podemos perder ni una posibilidad.

Ponerlo en la mesa como parte de nuestra tradición, explican nuestra cultura.

[...]

Pensé que era muy importante crear productos turísticos para poder desestacionalizar, ósea para buscar una sostenibilidad económica. Creamos diferentes productos a nivel individual, como visitar a productores, vacaciones de intercambios para conocer las tradiciones etc.

Lo que tuvo más éxito es el 5 Llacs, que son 5 días andando de casa rural a casa rural donde hay 7 económicas que se ven beneficiadas del producto.

Además fomentamos una movilidad más sostenible, para que la gente llegues con el tren, los picnics son en fiambreras para no generar residuos etc.

El 10% que paga la gente lo invertimos en hacer paredes de piedras secas, hay muchas responsabilidades.

A mi me preocupaba porque en Casa Leonardo el 40% de mis clientes empezaba a ser extranjeros, el 70% del 5 Llacs también eran extranjeros.

Vimos la necesidad de cuidar al paisaje y compensar nuestras emisiones.

Empecé a buscar y no ví proyectos para compensar a nivel local, [...] veía que mucho en realidad no tenían sentido. Entonces quería un proyecto que buscaba fomentar la compensación preventiva y no la correctiva - que trae la idea de consumir y ya pagas y te queda tranquilo - sino que con la preventiva para que la gente estimara más nuestro paisaje y cambiara de forma natural la forma de consumir.

De ahí se necesitaban herramientas que eran imposibles de gestionar por la asociación que reunía las casas rurales que colaboraban en el 5 Llacs - una página web, calculadora de emisiones etc - entonces fui a ver los del Leader Pirineo occidental, el grupo de acción local, les presento el proyecto y empezamos este proyecto con el Gratiid Pallars.

Para resumir intenté buscar la sostenibilidad económica con el 5 Llacs con otra gente a través de la cooperación con las otras casas rurales.

Luego intenté buscar mi sostenibilidad ambiental con Gratiid Pallars.

Finalmente, después de la pandemia, sentí la necesidad de una implicación a nivel social para ayudar a mi comunidad. Creamos una asociación que se llama "Centra dal municipi viu sostenible" donde vivimos 50 personas en el pueblo pero hay 200 socios. De ahí sale el proyecto Senterada viu con la idea de trabajar la autosuficiencia alimentaria con 3 ejes: el primero es que los jardines municipales sean comestibles, el segundo era recuperar la huerta - de momento hemos recuperado 4.000m² de huerta - para hacer cultivo ecológico y permacultura con la idea no es sólo tener productos frescos y ecológicos sino que sobretodo recuperar este espacio social que nos ayude a pensar al futuro que necesita nuestro mundo y cambiar los esquemas que nos introduce desde fuera, cómo no pensar al individual sino trabajar el colectivo porque aunque cueste más al final llegas muchos más lejos.

2 ¿Ha contado con fondos públicos o europeo (Leader) para la rehabilitación de la casa?

He tenido varios. Hace 20 años cuando cogí la casa, he tenido una ayuda del departamento de agricultura que tenía una parte pagada por el departamento y una parte por los fondos europeos. Luego volví a pedir unas ayudas de turismo para la ampliación bajo el tejado.

Últimamente he pedido 2 Leaders para renovar los baños, poner un sistema domótico para hacer más sostenible la casa para reducir el uso y gasto de aguas y energía. Con esto me han venido muy bien los Leaders que me han cubierto un 30% de la inversión.

No es difícil de pedir, lo más agotador son los papeles de la parte burocrática pero no es complicado.

3 ¿Casa Leonardo cuenta con diferentes certificaciones? Felicitaciones. ¿Está registrada también en el registro de casas rurales y cuenta con 4 espigas, verdad? ¿Me puede contar un poco más de cómo ha sido este proceso de categorización?

Yo creo que esto de la categorización ha sido muy buena idea. El TR nace como complemento a las explotaciones agropecuarias o agrarias, y entonces claro la gente no valoraba mucho la calidad de los servicios, pero con el tiempo el TR evoluciona y empieza a haber pequeños hoteles rurales. La categorización es un proyecto que va muy bien para que al cliente se ayude a ver lo que tiene las casas. Hay grupos que ya le vale una casa con una espiga y clientes que buscan un servicio de mayor calidad y comodidades.

Por eso la categorización es un buen sistema para que el cliente sepa dónde va y que la calidad-precio esté un poco acorde con las espigas.

El problema es que este sistema de categorización es voluntario y al no tenerlo se queda en el tintero, porque tampoco se promociona. Incluso yo este año me he renovado y lo que me dijo el inspector es que nadie ha pedido la revaluación de las espigas.

Bueno si no es obligatorio ya se pierde un poco, me parece que no sirve de mucho hasta que no se convierta en obligatorio. Aunque ordena un poco dando mínimo de calidad.

A mí todo lo que es de garantía ambiental y ecolabel me va bien, me dan objetivos de mejor siempre, pero hay gente que sí es como más cómoda y no se motiva tanto y ya le va bien.

3 ¿Casa Leonardo y, tú como individuo, colaboráis con otras casas en la promoción de productos turísticos de la zona, principalmente el 5 Llac, ¿cómo surge esta colaboración? ¿Se trata de la Asociación de Marques del Pastor - en qué momento nace y cómo funciona?

empezando por la Asociación de Marques del Pastor que es la asociación de los 6 alojamientos que gestionamos la ruta del 5 Llac más la agencia de viaje local que la comercializa.

Luego también estoy en la “Federación de Cans de turisme de Lleida” y TURALCAT a nivel de Catalunya; porque hacen de lobby a la administración, ayudan a promocionar aunque esto es más de uno que se tenga que comprometer.

Pero estás ahí y es una manera de defender el sector.

A nivel de asociaciones colaboro con muchas y diversas que ponen en valor el nuestro territorio, como por ejemplo Geoparc, Al teu gustó, Productos del Pallars.

Todo lo que hay yo voy, si puedo aportar algo yo encantada.

La Federación de Cans de turisme de Lleida y TURALCAT hacen formación, comercialización, lobby en la administración, tienen la página web.

4 ¿Sobre los proyectos que habéis estado creando en estos años, como por ejemplo Gratiud Pallars, hubo colaboración entres casas rurales y GAL referente? ¿Me puedes explicar un poco más sobre la relación que tenéis con el GAL - Leader Pirineu Occidental?

Bueno a nivel personal, con las ayudas que me han dado con la casa.

Luego para el proyecto Gratiud Pallars hemos colaborado en un proyecto de cooperación estratégica que tiene el Leader, por lo cual el 90% del proyecto lo paga el Leader y nuestra asociación solo un 10%. Eso es muy importante porque genera mucho trabajo y empleo.

5 ¿Habéis pensado en medidas de generación de empleo para las mujeres o jóvenes?

A nivel casa Leonardo, tengo muchas mujeres 100%.

Luego de los proyectos que estamos empezando, pedimos ayuda de garantía juvenil para formar joven. Por ejemplo, hemos tenido un ingeniero agrícola que había acabado sus estudios. Son ayuda de 6 mese desde el SOC - Servei d'Ocupació de Catalunya.

Ahora nos han dado otra para el proyecto "Senterada comestible" y tenemos que buscar un joven con el proyecto.

Siempre trabajamos con los sectores más complicados - mujeres y jóvenes.

6 ¿Qué relación tenéis con el RRN o su antena en Catalunya?

He colaborado explicando los proyectos, dando algunas informaciones.

No tengo aún mucho contacto.

7 Casa Leonardo funciona de propulsor para un turismo sostenible. ¿Cómo da soporte a los agricultores de la zona? ¿Fomenta el binomio agricultura-turismo?

Para mi los productores son básicos, son los que cuidan el paisaje y está claro que tenemos la obligación con ellos y que lo tenemos que soportar, consumir, promocionar como podemos. Incluso desde Gratiud Pallars luchamos para que el turismo no vaya por sí solo, "somos dos y vamos juntos, el turismo vive de vuestro paisaje y el territorio necesita gente que consume sus productos". Desde el proyectos GP promovemos trabajar de forma transversal y hemos hecho unas jornadas para elaborar un video que incluya unos 7 productores que trabajan de una manera especial el

paisaje y tienen una responsabilidad que no solo se relaciona a la productividad y seguir con las líneas que imponen desde Europa en maximizan la cantidad y no calidad, [...] mejor tener menos, pero tener más cuidado. Allá en Inglaterra hay unas ayudas que se dan al agricultor y según el compromiso que tiene el agricultor con el territorio y la biodiversidad, le pagan la hectárea más [...]. Aquí hay políticas agrarias que tienen que cambiar mucho.

Si los agricultores persiguen su productividad, pueden igual favorecer nuestra biodiversidad mucho mejor, porque sino vamos a encontrar muchos territorios abandonados.

8 Los Pirineos son una zona bastante turística. ¿Crees que hay algún impacto negativo evidenciados por los locales?

Pallars es una zona de paso hacia la alta montaña. Ahora nos estamos reinventando y haciendo cosas diferentes y con el hecho que no ha tenido turismo por muchos años, hace que todo esté como muy auténtico y es lo que más les gusta a los visitantes.

Tenemos que continuar trabajando para hacer que el turismo no se concentre en zona típica sino hacer que todo el territorio sea visitable, con lo cual hay una dispersión y no molesta ni al local ni a la biodiversidad. Este es un poco la idea que queremos adelantar con Gratitude Pallars y con las microreservas, que cualquier espacio si está cuidado tiene un potencial increíble. Por ejemplo, nuestro paisaje está formado por piedras secas y biodiversidad. Así creamos la figuras de la microreservas, pequeños espacios que tiene un interés especial - por la presencia de una especie, la pequeña fauna que es tan importante por nuestra biodiversidad. De allí hemos hechos unos acuerdos con los propietarios para gestionar los espacios con unos objetivos muy concretos, entonces hay microreservas que son de conservación que no hacemos públicas, mientras hay algunas pensada para llevar la gente en la naturaleza y que lo disfrutes y cambie a partir de ahí métodos de consumo, intentando a hacer una compensación preventiva como te decía.

En turismo lo que es malo es vender las iconas, mientras hay espacios muchos más bonitos. Si conseguimos vender todo el territorio, primero la experiencia es mucho más buena porque la gente lo disfruta 100% y luego tu impacto es mínimo.

Tenemos que trabajar desde este aspecto en turismo, ya no es vender una imagen sino venderlo todo, la gente y el paisaje. Yo digo que al viajar siempre te acuerdas de las personas que te has encontrado por el camino, mientras el paisaje puede ser más seco o más verde pero realmente lo que hace que sea una experiencia inolvidable son las personas que te has encontrado.

Por eso no hace falta crear lugares de aglomeraciones, que encima destruyen, erosionan, perjudican la biodiversidad.

9. ¿Cuál es la tipología de turistas que llegan a Casa Leonardo y en la zona en general?

Si te lo trabajas, puede hacer llegar quien quieres!

A nivel de comunicación yo trato de llegar a la clientela que me guste. Mis mensajes siguen esta filosofía, al que le toque el corazón será el que va a venir a tu casa.

Si apostáis por la sostenibilidad, tenéis que dejar de hacer algunas cosas.

Por ejemplo, en Agosto sale todo el mundo, y me viene el cliente que a mi no me gusta.

Además de Casa Leonardo que es más controlable, me ocupo de la gestión del bar y en agosto siempre hay muchas gente.

Somos un pueblo de 50 personas y en verano llegamos a ser más de mil, también por las segundas residencias, que hay muchas en Senterada. Cómo no hay muchas cosas por la zona, vienen también de los otros pueblos y llega mucha gente.

Si desestacionaliza ya está bien, pero el objetivo principal era buscar la calidad de la gente, el bienestar. Luego en otras temporadas el pueblo es triste, hay muy poca gente.

Leyendo ahora están de moda los Agrihubs, donde la gente puede hacer ejercicios y alimentarse de forma saludable. La idea es captar gente para que vea que se vive bien, que hay unión, que se trabaja en comunidad, que se puede hacer ejercicios, comer bien. [...]

10 ¿Habéis vivido un cambio antes y después del Covid? Por ejemplo el proyecto Senterada viu? A

nivel de pueblo hemos ganado en población y esto es muy bueno. Algo bueno del Covid es acercar la gente al territorio rural, entendiendo que en la ciudad no se puede vivir bien. También de unir la gente, que unidos podemos llegar mucho más lejos.

A nivel de negocio ha sido complicado este año, porque mantener a las personas ha sido difícil, pero ha ido bien hemos podido mantenerlo también porque el año anterior, el verano, había ido particularmente bien.

Con el proyecto Senterada viu hemos logrado unir los esfuerzos y estamos buscando la autosuficiencia alimenticia.

11 ¿Habéis notado algún cambio en término de llegadas, tipologías de clientes, estancia, temporada baja/alta?

Antes del Covid, el 40% eran extranjeros. Además por la forma de trabajar, he conseguido que también en baja temporada Marzo-Abril o en Otoño me vengan clientes extranjeros. Menos Agosto, desde Marzo a Noviembre se puede trabajar muy bien.

Antes de la pandemia, el resto un 60% eran catalanes.

Ahora después de la pandemia, casi todos son del área metropolitana de Barcelona.

Luego un 2% es extranjeros, aunque cada vez más veo que vuelven a aumentar las reservas por parte de los extranjeros.

Después de la pandemia, todos se querían escapar al monte, fue una pasada hubo muchas reservas de catalanes. La demanda era muy abundante, poco a poco se va a estabilizar un poco.

La gente tenía mucha gana de salir, ahora si vamos a empezar el año normal que se puede salir el

fin de semana, se va a trabajar de manera más estable.

12. ¿Cuáles son los planes a futuro?

Cada año hay objetivos de mejora sobre los que ya tenemos.

Además de proyectos grandes digamos que ya tenemos bastante, es importante hacer que pueda ir consolidándose ya vamos a pagar.