

TOURISM AND RURAL

DEPOPULATION



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ABSTRACT

In this work, the evolution of rural tourism is analyzed through some variables such as the employment or the type of rural accommodation together with the depopulation of the interior areas of the Valencian Community providing opportunities and difficulties in rural areas. The analysis was conducted between the years 2010 and 2020. I also glimpse the emptied Spain and I analyze how the municipalities are distributed depending on the greater or lesser risk of depopulation in the different provinces of the Community. We will see how the northern part of the Community is more affected by the lack of population in its villages while employment and rural tourism in the Valencian territory do not follow the same trend.

KEYWORDS

- Valencian Community
- Rural development
- Rural tourism
- Depopulation

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this Final Degree Project (FDP) is to analyze rural tourism, giving a small comment on how emptied Spain and tourism are in those areas, but focusing mainly on the Valencian Community. First of all, I will give a glimpse on rural depopulation in Spain. This will help us to have a small idea of how the interior of our territory is, that in this case will be the Valencian area. The study period chosen is from a few years back to the present, that is, the analysis section is made up of the last 11 years (2010-2020). In this way we can have a broad vision and see how the situation has improved and where it has not been possible to advance as we should have done. Later, we will focus our work on the Valencian Community, a territory with a number of known and significant areas for the country as a whole. In this point, we will analyse the benefits and the drawbacks of rural depopulation and therefore, the possibility of rural tourism; followed by an analysis of the data with variables chosen as employment and accommodation in rural areas to make a comparison between provinces and to study the evolution of the Community in terms of tourism.

Regarding the time period chosen to analyse some of the most important variables representative in my study have been from 2010 to practically today, the year 2020. To analyse the evolution of depopulation and rural tourism, we have extracted data from two different sources such as the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) and the Valencian Institute of Statistics (VIS) to obtain more specific data from the Valencian Community, since it provides information by municipalities and regions and also the Valencian Cartographic Institute, where thanks to a map, we can see the more depopulated areas of the Community from north to south.

Rural tourism was born as an alternative to traditional, massive or standardised tourism (Varisco, 2016). The fundamental characteristic of this new tourism is that it develops in rural areas, so it is based on environmental, cultural, social and economic principles and it does not have a seasonal character like traditional tourism, that is, in summer for example, beach tourism and in winter, mountain tourism; this way of tourism can be done in any season of the year. The rural tourist searches a healthy environment in nature (Pitarch, Buciega and Esparcia, 2004), and rural areas offer great tourist potential, as they have natural landscapes, culture, tradition and gastronomy and, in addition, they offer outdoor activities (Navarro, 2015). Furthermore, tourism in these areas becomes an alternative for diversification and reconversion of traditional industries (Zou, Huang and Ding, 2012) and it has the advantage that these areas can integrate their daily activities into tourism, developing a tour package that can respond to the need for new experiences (Kastenholz, Carneiro, Marques and Lima, 2012), since these types of tourists are interested in culture and local traditions, allowing interaction between them and local residents (Bell and Arranz, 2011).

In the last decades, rural tourism has become one of the main important economic activities and source of income in most rural areas from Spain. This boom has also been favoured by the increase in the available offer, since the building or restoration of accommodation such as rural houses or shelters has increased sharply. Large investments, financed primarily through European funds have generated the appearance in the market of an offer of wide and heterogeneous accommodation (Secretary of State for Commerce, Tourism and Small and Medium Enterprise and Ministry of Economy, 2000). So in the following pages I will

explain all my study and analysis of rural depopulation together with the tourism associated with nature.

RURAL TOURISM AS A CONCEPT

Rural tourism is the tourist activity that takes place in rural areas, formed by a leisure offer and different activities that cannot be found or performed in urban and crowded areas, since the entire environment is characterized by being a natural environment. This type of tourism is also favourable to maintain the communication with society and its residents in different rural areas.

This concept is a new way of knowing and visiting natural spaces that in recent years is gaining strength, being one of the most extensive resources, with great diversity among them but being the one with the largest geographical area in relation, for example, with the coastal territory, which, even though it is very extensive, it is less than rural areas. And on the other hand, these natural and quiet areas have a high degree of landscape richness and with great capacities to promote and carry out different tourist activities. It has a great importance in the rural environment since it helps to complement the agricultural income and even to eliminate, little by little, the depopulation suffered by most of these areas. The concept of rural tourism should be understood as a very interesting option economically for the corresponding areas and also, as a strategic point that helps the territorial development of rural areas with problems of depopulation and negative benefits. These factors are what make rural tourism a positive alternative for a country and for localities at risk of depopulation.

RURAL DEPOPULATION AS A CONCEPT

Depopulation is a concept that we have very much in mind today, considering itself a negative aspect within a country or territory, since it implies that there are areas where, in a few years, gastronomy, customs, the few goods and services which they had and a lot of traditional work activity have been lost. So this lack of population can be defined as the process in which there is a loss of citizens of the rural area due to the effect of overcrowding and emigration of the population to the urban areas.

AN OVERVIEW OF EMPTY SPAIN

The phenomenon of interior emptying until reaching the current emptied Spain still persists in its rural depopulation while urban growth, the tourist coastline and a few interior spaces corresponding to mountain privileged towns or peri-urban areas and regional service centers continue. One of the collateral damages of depopulation in Spain is gender inequality due to rural community life in which men are much more linked to the households of origin and to live alone, while women, especially in their childbearing years, look for professional opportunities in the cities. This is what Afammer states, the Association of Rural Families and Women, which in 2018 served two million people from the so-called empty Spain with their programs.

The constant depopulation of rural areas is a phenomenon observed worldwide from the sixties until nowadays. Losses of rural population have been more pronounced in towns of the interior of the peninsula compared to coastal areas, since coastal areas have multiple advantages over interior areas, characterized by an added difficulty of access and orography and more extreme climate. The delimitation of rural space and urban space has always constituted a problem, since as the city spread out into the countryside, there was an improvement in communications and the concept of the urban was broadened to include the "Suburbs" or "peri-urban areas", which are characterized by having a rural but dynamic aspect and with urban functions.

Over the years it has been possible to observe how the rural area of Spain is clearly dual, this means that due to internal weight loss, the thickness of the periphery and areas of urban influence is consolidated. This phenomenon is very striking since it shows a great difference in factors such as the number of inhabitants between some zones and others, the infrastructures of which some and not others, which have repercussions in the benefits obtained in each place, and a large number of variations that generates strong concern about rural emptying. Since the late 1970s the territorial situation required the adoption of corrective measures to try to resolve the strong differences with respect to disadvantaged areas and mountain agriculture (Sumpsi, 1994). Since then until today, sets of measures financed through different Structural Funds have been articulated, they help to improve competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors, agro-environmental measures, increasing the quality of life in rural areas and promoting diversification of the rural economy, as well as local building capacities. The investment has helped to enhance the different elements of the quantitative creation of basic tourism offer (accommodation places), new active tourism activities in the nature and, indirectly, sectors such as construction have been activated through renovation and maintenance projects of the traditional architecture of towns, the local agri-food industry has been promoted and new public services have been created.

Starting in the 1990s, the Rural renaissance, the multifunctionality of rural spaces and spatial planning rural areas started to be considered, while in the 21st century studies the recovery of the countryside and how to plan the rural depopulation caused by the exodus prevailed.

Contrary to what has happened in other rural areas, in Spain there is an accelerated migratory progress during the second half of the twentieth century, while in the large European countries these changes, slower and better assimilated, began with the industrial revolution and continued after the implementation of the Marshall Plan in the 1960s, being in those days and today, the low demographic density of Spain. It cannot be forgotten that in the interior the maximum demographic was reached in different moments of the 20th century, when the mountainous areas closest to industrial parks began to lose their working population, culminating this process in the 1960s, leaving the rural area with hardly any population and therefore with a poor rural structure that collapsed after the exodus. Only industrial regions were capable of generating a more populated field in their surroundings.

The loss of rural population is the logical consequence of adopting a productive model in whose space agriculture still predominates as an economic activity, but technical agriculture or the livestock sector does not need much labour since technological infrastructures have been installed many times, also helping to generate a rural space of intense abandonment,

even though it has not affected equally the entire Spanish territory in terms of pace, intensity or degree of residential emptying. The population of a relatively close area represents a potential client and consumer for neighbouring spaces. These population changes do not represent just a migratory movement, but also a mutation in the settlements, which lose people and services at the same time. The change in the economic model, from that of traditional agriculture to that of an industrial society from the 60s on, influences but it is not of course the main cause of the continuous rural abandonment of the interior of Spain. And it is often forgotten that, among the factors of rural rejection, there is a permanent and structural factor, such as the scarce accessibility, both physical, telematic and social. The cold and frost winters, rough roads, and inconvenient displacements for a good part of the year are difficult to overcome. And if we add the loss of services to the loss of population, we will have an unflattering snapshot to reclaim the field as a space where to remake the life of an urban dweller.

In the past the abundance of the working population was largely related to agriculture, which was not very productive and efficient. Nevertheless, today things have radically changed, as a result of aging leading to half of the inhabitants of small towns being retired and the other half active, but only about 73,010 being related to farming. The employed population in rural areas in 2020 reached only 1,861,068 million contributors, out of 18,669,572 million in Spain, or 9,9%. There is a tendency to concentrate urban population and economic activity that is not linked to policies against high rural emptying. There are more stuck and deeper rural spaces that have a most notable feature, apart from demographic regression, they have high aging indices; and because of this, perhaps caring for elderly could become a source of significant job creation. These rural spaces are the ones that stand out above the others and those that imply a negative character to the rural space of the interior of Spain. It does not only affect the most backward and least industrialized regions since we also find them in the Catalan Pyrenees, in the Valencian mountains or in the mountain range of Madrid. The most striking feature is the loss of inhabitants, but the biggest problem is the low population density, since there is a shortage and difficulty in having services and maintaining social relationships.

The rural area of Spain evolves towards a consolidation of duality, given that it is heading towards greater abandonment and even loss of jobs in the agricultural and livestock sector, which constituted its economic and social foundation until the 2008 economic crisis that affected many of the potential sectors of our country. On the contrary, rural areas that have a greater dynamism for the purposes of employment and activities to attract the attention of families accumulate investments, grow in population and improvement in infrastructures and services, in addition to becoming a beneficiary of numerous aids aimed at and used to contribute to the fight against depopulation. The current effort of the administrations and the leaders to try to combat rural depopulation and favour the rural environment tourism or the improvement of natural and traditional goods and services in the area, but as we well know, any action requires investment and it is precisely what is missing in the country. Therefore, there is a lack of investments in small companies, in the use and transformation of agricultural products, handicrafts, agriculture and ecological livestock, in rural accommodation, etc... Do not forget that the country is the place of rejection due to its difficult conditions of physical, telematic and social accessibility, that requires a population organization to favour the interior, and not only the areas of coast. In the Valencian territory,

although the population as a whole has not decreased, an important imbalance between the inland regions and the coast has been produced, in obvious detriment of the former. It is not necessary to draw attention to the importance of rural world in the desirable territorial balance, nor on the deep dependence that contemporary society has in terms of health, food and leisure, while cities grow disproportionately, reduce their environmental quality and they even seem to want to impose their urban patterns on the rest of the territory.

All reforms such as measures to promote communications and public transport, improve road infrastructures, strategies for demographic increase and national health and school or rural development plans must include special attention to educational permanence and quality health. It is essential to encourage agricultural, livestock, forestry and energy activities, fishing, heritage and rural tourism, as well as the study and research of nature, and connectivity through broadband.

Aid for the construction of new homes or the rehabilitation of existing ones, public-private collaboration or agreements with public bodies for the home delivery of various products and medicines are crucial for the current lifestyle of the Spanish population and are obviously necessary for any citizen who wants to establish anywhere in the country, and even more so, for people who want to continue or start a life in any inland town diagnosed at risk of depopulation.

RURAL DEPOPULATION IN THE VALENCIAN COMMUNITY

The Valencian Community has 542 municipalities, out of which 215 have a population of less than 1,000 inhabitants and the percentage of dependent population corresponds reaches 60%. A total of 72,000 people live in the interior of the Community inhabiting areas with a population density of less than 20 inhabitants per square kilometer. Similarly, in the last 60 years, 500 villages have been abandoned throughout the Valencian territory. (ceice.gva.es)

The Valencian Community has been chosen because it has representative rural territories of typical problems of rural areas in southern Europe and especially in the area of influence of the Mediterranean, with mountain areas relatively close to the coast (not more than 80 km of populated coastal areas with a great vocation towards sun tourism and well-consolidated beaches), with small municipalities, many with populations that do not have more than 2,000 inhabitants, almost always in natural settings of great value, and with a well preserved historical heritage. In all the regions the existence of some municipality that reaches or approaches 5,000 inhabitants that act as regional nodes, articulating the territory and as providers of services and trade for the rest of the local entities.

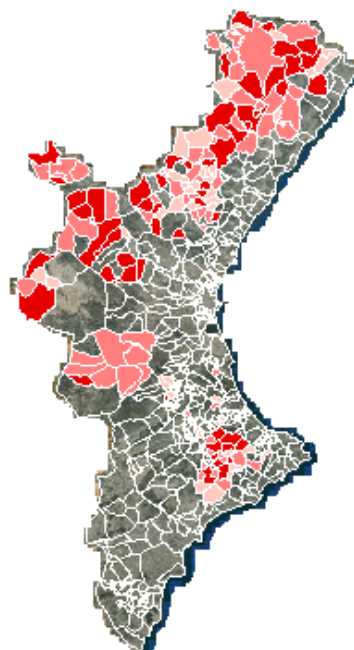
On the other hand, the Community presents a series of internal territorial imbalances, with a population of more than 5 million inhabitants located mainly in the strip coastline, being the rural areas almost uninhabited. Population, resources, and capital have been condensed in urban and coastal areas while rural areas experience a depopulation and a poor vision of the future, causing constant flows migratory to richer areas. Territorial disproportion has led to a situation where the development of rural areas is necessary and essential, and tourism has

become an activity that integrates traditional sectors in decline such as agriculture, rancher or forester.

The "dualization" that occurs in the Community is not a problem only for those who live in the interior territory, but for the entire set of inhabitants. For a few years ago, depopulation has been put on the board of important points to deal with in many administrations, both at community and national level. To advance in rural territories, we have to believe in the people who live in them to be able to believe in the policies applied later for the development of peoples or the affected areas. For this reason, local entities are important, which are the strengths to fight depopulation and they are the ones who can exert the greatest force to revitalize and improve the conditions of a half-abandoned territory, being an essential element to defend the existence of the villages.

It is very important to promote job creation in these territories, since like all know, without work there is no future. In relation to employment in these areas, it is necessary to emphasize essential telecommunications mechanisms so that all who want to continue or start a life in a rural area, have all the possibilities and do not remain isolated, both socially, labour, economically, etc.

Municipalities at risk of depopulation



Source: Valencian Cartographic Institute

The objective of the previous graph is to show how the depopulation situation is in the Valencian Community in a more graphic way to be able to assimilate how to find the territory. As for the legend of the graph, it is divided into four colors:

- The areas coloured with a more intense red are the localities with a risk of very advanced depopulation.
- The areas coloured with a strong pink correspond to the localities with a high risk of depopulation.
- The areas marked with a more pastel colour indicate the localities that have a moderate risk of depopulation.
- The areas marked with white are the towns with the best situation, that is, they do not have any type of risk of depopulation.

If we focus on the different provinces of the Community, we see how there are large differences between them, with areas highly affected by depopulation and, on the other hand, others that hardly suffer this negative effect for a territory.

Starting with the most affected, that is, Castellón, we see how most of the interior of the province is in red or pink, telling us that it is a province with very high rates of rural depopulation, this being detrimental to society and for its residents. The most affected part is the one furthest from the most important urban nucleus and for this reason its younger residents decide to abandon the town and the older people are the ones who stay in it, making every time a minor population census until they are in the current depopulation situation. On the other hand, the accesses and the difficulty of the roads, especially in winter is also a negative point for these remote villages, most of them are 1 hour away or more from Castellón city. In this territorial area the villages that can supply the most distant ones are Vall d'Alba or Albocacer, but it is true that the needs they cover are basic, since for example if you need some type of textile-related product, you have to travel to Castellón.

As for the southernmost interior area of the province, we see how most of the territories are at moderate risk or even without risk. This is due to the fact that they have better accesses and a nearby town with greater capacity for supplying first necessities without having to travel to the capital such as Alcora, Onda, Segorbe, among others. In these cases, unlike the most northern area, you can find clothing stores or other products that cover not only the basic needs but they also have industry and great capacity for employment and therefore you do not have the obligation to move to a main urban nucleus.

If we focus now on the province of Valencia, you have fewer territorial areas with a high risk of depopulation, that is, it has fewer red and pink areas in relation to the province of Castellón. The most affected municipalities are those in the Rincón de Ademuz, Los Serranos in the northern part; the westernmost part of Requena-Utiel and to the south, the region with the highest risk is the one that corresponds to the Valley of Ayora.

And finally, regarding the province of Alicante we can see how it is in the best situation of the three. The province of Alicante is more concentrated and smaller than, for example, Castellón. Many of the regions in which it is divided are located in the coastal area, being this a strong point for their residents, for their tourism and above all, for their economy. For this reason, we hardly observe localities with a high risk of depopulation, apart from the municipalities of El Comptat and the west of the Marina Alta

In most of the distribution by regions of the province of Alicante there are major cities, so that there are a certain number of residents, tourists and society that is maintained in these places, since they have all kinds of needs covered, whether educational, health, food, textile, among others. This is demonstrated with urban centers that form cities such as Orihuela, Elche, Alcoy, Xixona, La Nucia, etc ... spread throughout the province.

PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE RURAL FIELD

→ Problems of the rural environment

The public administrations should address the different problems that municipalities at risk of depopulation of our Valencian territory suffer, since these problems hinder and condition the development of rural territories.

One of the most significant problems of the entire rural environment is the lack of young population, that is, most of the rural municipalities are characterised by having a few negative vegetative balances due to the high number of deaths and the scarcity of births, influencing in an aging population structure, in addition to having a greater number of male population over female. In relation to this lack of active population, negative migratory balances do not help to recover the demographic declining that many rural territories are suffering over several years, being a negative point for prospering and advancing. The low birth rate and aging of the Valencian society as a whole has led the Community to a significant decrease in the generational replacement rate for rural areas throughout the last half of the century until today. As a general rule, the lack of population has a negative impact on the affected areas due to the decrease in consumption, labour and economies of scale in terms of the possible provision that entrepreneurs can make rural areas for the supply of goods and services.

This high level of aging has an impact on the loss of part of the existing workforce in rural areas due to the decrease in the birth rate and the increase in emigration to urban centers. Due to this problem, the population flow increases to higher ratios to urban areas, enhancing everything related to the urban world and consequently, residents in rural areas are lost, putting the balance in decline demographic in terms of the different economic activities related to the goods and indigenous services. These decreasing levels of rural residents are observed in many of the territories in the interior of the Valencian Community, let's talk about

Castellón, Valencia or Alicante. But it is true that of the 171 towns that were in danger of depopulation in 2019, most of them are in the Castellón province. Also, one of the points that makes the population migrate to the urban areas and do not start a life in their rural locality is the lack of housing in sale or rent together with homes that are vacant and in deteriorated conditions. In the latter case, the houses that want to be rented or sold, have to be reformed practically completely, being a possible impediment to the younger generations or for families who may want to settle in a rural area for its tranquility and well-being. In this case as in many others, it requires the public intervention that allows improving access to housing so that it is not a problem that conditions the fixation of the population in the Valencian interior.

On the other hand, the primary sector is one of the most important sectors of the economy of a rural territory since it is a source to provide food, being a first-rate good need that plays a fundamental role in Valencian society, which goes beyond the simple contribution to the economy or to the creation of local employment. In relation to the agricultural sector, this has suffered a great loss as a labour activity since many of the potential workers in this sector have made their lives in urban areas with the intention of having better working conditions and greater economic opportunities.

In 2019, the Agricultural Added Value in the Valencian Community amounted to 2,227,555 million euros, compared to the 32,550,000 million euros of the AAV of Spain. If translated into a percentage, the participation of the Valencian AAV represents 6.84% of the national total. These data show that we are facing a sector that tries to get closer and meet the strategic objectives of the environment and the rural environment, such as the conservation of the historical, cultural, architectural and landscape heritage, to improve the conditions and promote the areas in a way that it makes rural tourism increases and decreases the rate depopulation. In addition, we must keep in mind that these data are so relevant because they are closely linked with agricultural activities, a very important sector for the inland locations. Although in recent years it has been observed a gradual fall in the cultivated area as a result of the period of abandonment of land and agricultural activities due to the high level of emigration to the urban areas.

As a general rule, in Spain and in this case in the Valencian Community, we have little initiative when creating from scratch a business activity in which you have to invest. But as we well know, the business fabric is a key element in the development of a specific country or geographical area, both economically and socially. As for the Valencian business group, it focuses on small and medium-sized companies (SMEs), related and directed to industries such as footwear, ceramics, toys, tourism, hotels or chemistry. Work activity in the middle rural is characterized by a low qualification of the labour market, due to the lower demand and supply of highly qualified employment. That is, due to the little need for training of agricultural employees, the predominance of part-time contracts, and a labour that cannot build a new life in a rural area, in most of the cases, due to the temporary nature of the work they perform. Thus we can say that the rural labour market is quite weak due to the scarce

qualified contracts, many of them temporary due to lack of work. If we talk about investment, investing in rural areas has added difficulties in relation to urban territories due, in addition to a lower productive fabric and the high level of aging of the population, also due to the lack of advanced equipment and services and because of the distance and access that many of these rural municipalities have to the nuclei urban. This last factor, mobility, becomes a difficulty in accessing the world of work by young people living in rural areas making this part of the population must go, sometimes obligatorily, to urban areas with more job opportunities to qualify for better wages and growth opportunities. In fact, access to employment in rural areas is closely linked to options for transportation to avoid the limitations of local labour markets, becoming a form of labour insertion among the youngest and most active population of the rural territories.

Regarding the activities related to the service sector, in the rural world there are less developed as there is less variety. The agri-food industry is a rural-related economic activity due to the high correlation with the local artisan elaborations which could be a potential employment option and as far as the construction, this labour activity has enjoyed a small growth due to the dynamism of rural tourism and the fact that many families have decided to buy or reform a house as a second home incurring a greater dispersion geographic. Another condition or impediment to repopulation is the deficit of equipment and services such as Internet access, so necessary in our day to day. The well-known “digital divide” is very present in the municipalities with the highest risk of depopulation, since there is a deficit in terms of telecommunications. Because of this lack of infrastructure, it is as difficult to carry out business activities as it is to formalities or procedures, improve access to education or telework, very fashionable in recent months due to the pandemic that surrounds the whole world, being a style of work that seems to have come to stay.

On February 28th, 2019, the Generalitat approved Law 5/2019 focused on the structures farms of the Valencian Community. This law aims to increase productivity through an equitable and egalitarian development model, achieving a territory balanced and sustainable. On the other hand, you want to obtain full integration of the information in society, carrying out permanent educational training and offering a market stable employment with most young people and women. Also with access to new technologies suitable for the times in which we live, so that we have the ability to develop active policies that help drive all activities and services that are lacking in the most depopulated interior territories. And finally, a law with characteristics based on the incorporation of innovation processes in the agrarian sector to use resources more rationally and protect the environment.

The National Rural Network (NRN) is an integrated platform by the administrations, both state, regional and local, with social and economic agents, representatives of the civil society and research organizations linked to rural areas whose role is to main objective to promote rural development. This platform informs and says that the innovation is a fundamental instrument in the development of an area and of any sector, but it is more necessary in the

rural world, so that if the Valencian Community goes having at your disposal people dedicated to agriculture and also entrepreneurs, easier and faster it will be to reach a turning point where the model has been modified productive to a more advanced and strong economically and socially.

The Valencian Community has an important territorial duality, between rural and coastal areas. For this reason, it is advisable and necessary to have an adequate connectivity between both areas but it is true that the infrastructures that they connect have a high deficit when it comes to guaranteeing access to all kinds of territories. According to the indicators of the Valencian Antidepopulation Agenda, 81% of the localities at risk of depopulation have low or very low accessibility and more than 60% have significantly low levels of public equipment. The lack of means of public transport negatively affects the development of accessibility to the rural environment, since in the case of having more public transport time slots together with better roads and accesses, this would facilitate the necessary movements of the residents. The scarcity of these means of transport together with the accesses makes the need for many rural citizens to travel to go to school, doctor, bank, among others more complicated. These difficulties should be eliminated as far as possible to guarantee the same accessibility rights to daily needs by the rural residents to eradicate their discrimination and equalize the conditions those of residents of urban areas. In short, the guarantee of provision of quality public services, adapted to the specific characteristics of the rural environment, focusing on education, health, social services and citizen security, is essential for the equality of all citizens.

→ Opportunities of the rural environment

In the following paragraphs I will explain the opportunities that rural areas have to be able to establish a relationship with the world of work, tourism, nature, traditions, infrastructures and technological advances, among others.

It is important to highlight a factor that differentiates the rural environment of the Valencian Community from many other regions and that it is relevant to the opportunities shown below. First, we find that most of the rural areas of the Community are close to the urban environment, this being a very positive for families or individuals who intend to start a new life in a rural area, because on the one hand, they have the possibility of being able to have first needs covered and at the same time living in a quiet and natural place; and on the other hand, it is a significant aspect for the development of economic activities in the based on the supply of new goods and services.

The territorial situation means that rural municipalities, even many of those that are at risk of depopulation, are located at a relatively close distance or not too far from both the coast and the urban centers. Taking advantage of this opportunity has an impact on the establishment of different forms of collaboration and coordination between urban and rural. In this sense, the types of relationships are diverse that could be established between both areas, the

coordination of which would make it possible to take advantage of the strong points and avoid weak points to improve each area (rural and coastal) in an individual but could grow at the same rate and obtain adequate benefits both. The aspects in which there could be union would be in terms of cultural relationships and knowledge exchange, the provision of food from proximity that allows establishing links between responsible consumption and the market sustainable food, local jobs and rural-urban mobility that originates around them, or the provision of environmental services.

One of the strengths of the Valencian rural economic system is the development of the agri-food cooperatives. These unions have a great socioeconomic relevance in the zone both for the creation of direct employment and for the economic dynamism that can generate around, favouring the activity of agricultural holdings through partners and promoting non-agricultural activities on a regular basis, to make other aspects of the rural environment public and being able to attract the attention of more people. For this part, rural cooperatives are the most important within cooperatives, since they have an agrarian tradition that with the passage of time and the new needs of the neighbours, have been acquiring services that function as supermarkets, gas stations, agencies, tourist offices, and a long list.

The Valencian rural environment received, a few years ago, a high number of foreign people, a fact that has improved the risk of depopulation in some localities and that it constitutes an opportunity to improve life in rural environments, both for the local population as well as for the foreign one. Much of this migration has been with the objective of finding employment and better living conditions, so that the data from Social Security affiliation in the third quarter of 2019 show that, among the population resident of municipalities at risk of depopulation, there are a total of 2,065 people foreigners affiliated to Social Security: 569 in localities with a very high risk of depopulation, 871 in municipalities with high risk of depopulation, and 625 people foreign residents in those of moderate risk. These data mean that rural Valencian areas have enough capacity to attract the population of foreign origin aimed at work activity, a fact that also facilitates the availability of workers for carrying out the economic activities of each rural territory.

Second, agriculture is a fundamental activity in the Valencian economy and in terms of traditional community employment. To enhance the maintenance of the field and of young people in rural areas and in their villages of origin, the Agricultural European Fund of Rural Development (AEFRD) offers grants to young farmers with a maximum of 70,000 euros in the case of the Valencian Community. In this way, the beginning of their work activity is not so expensive for them and they make sure there is a generational relief in the lands so that they continue to be worked by young people wanting to grow and continue in the rural world. Besides agriculture, the other strong point of territory is livestock, either intensive or extensive. If we refer to the intensive, this is, above all, related to pig and poultry farms. On the contrary, the extensive livestock farming is important and necessary for the production of quality food and it helps the cleaning of the mountains thanks to the grazing of animals, also incurring the prevention of forest fires.

Within our territory, we can find a great variety of agricultural productions and livestock, always adapted to the area in question, since each product has specific different climate and soil characteristics. The commitment to the quality of production and dynamism of a sector that coordinates the export vocation with the markets of proximity, makes it the backbone of the rural environment of the Valencian Community, whose importance goes beyond its mere contribution to the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the autonomy. The great relationship between the quality food production and the territories of the rural areas is endorsed by the numerous Designations of Origin (DO) and Protected Geographical Indications (PGI) in the municipalities at risk of depopulation that exist. On the one hand, we have the DO Wines Utiel-Requena, the DO Oil of the Region Valenciana, the CV brand for Salzadella cherries, the PGI mountain cherries from Alicante, and the IGP Castelló, previously known as “Vins de la Terra de Castelló”.

Another of the most recognized aspects of the territories in danger of depopulation comes from the hand of the "natural products" available in these areas. Food quality in this area is internationally recognized having obtained specific denominations of origin, such as the “esperiega” apple of the Rincon of Ademuz or the “flaons” of Morella. Within quality food, we also find the certification of "organic production" and its great expansion being another of the arguments by which it is allowed to increase the added value of production, while contributing to the protection of the natural environment. In 2016, the Conselleria de la Generalitat had as one of its main objectives an organic farming plan to promote this type of product and this new way of feeding through different mechanisms to incentivise citizens and the market, in such a way that they are introducing in the day to day of the people. The fact of encouraging and enhancing indigenous products of an area, whether they are organic or not, allows the interior agriculture to contribute strategically to the supply of local food, so that they are made known and influence the potential job market.

The Valencian Community has a very positive aspect compared to other Spanish communities, and this is the climate. This characteristic allows to extract the attractiveness of the Valencian rural means in the implantation and exploitation of the different renewable energies, being the solar energy the most important. The establishment of these alternative energies has to become, in a not very distant future, an opportunity for work activity and income generation.

Within the Community we find different emblematic places for their environmental, cultural, agricultural or landscape characteristics that are listed in the Law 5/2014, of July 25, of the Generalitat Valenciana, on Territorial Planning, Urbanism and Landscape of the Valencian Community; emphasising the concept known as "green infrastructure", differentiating it from urban areas. Among them, the protected natural spaces are related, humid ecosystems and bodies of water continental and surface areas, the spaces that make up the Natura 2000 Network, the mountains of public domain and public utility and spaces of high cultural value. According to Territorial Strategy of the Valencian Community (TSVC), the landscapes of which we have in the community constitute a territorial attraction with a high economic and

cultural potential and indicates an identity of a specific territory. In our rural municipalities, agricultural and forestry land tend to share relevance, as a consequence of the peculiar morphology of the territory, for this part, the Program of Rural Development of the Valencian Community 2014-2020 announces that in the Valencian forest heritage, the ecosystems are responsible for maintaining and conserving biodiversity, benefiting both local populations and society in general. As to the entire set of available protected natural surface of the Community, we can find up to 22 natural parks; this protected land heritage symbolises 40% of the total area of the Valencian territory.

The monuments, the gastronomy, the artisan products, the traditions, the patron saint and foundational festivities and recreational and leisure activities, such as hunting, fishing, hiking or agritourism are the options offered by the rural area of the Community being able to become a claim for rural tourism, either national or international. All the aforementioned is thanks to the great patrimonial and cultural wealth of the Valencian territory, since this also allows to have a differentiator value compared to other territories, being strong points to increase the recognition of the municipalities together with the ecological and environmental heritage to help promote sustainable tourism development within rural areas.

Continuing with the previous paragraph, we know that the rural tourist offer that can and reaches the Valencian Community is wide and varied, being one of the most powerful important of our territory. The practice of rural tourism in our Community is an activity much sought after in recent years, and as the Observatory of rural tourism, most of the people residing in the Valencian Community practice rural tourism at least once a year. The origin of the tourists that the Valencian territory welcomes are firstly those of the Community; in the second place, are those belonging to Catalonia followed by the population of the Community of Madrid.

ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF RURAL TOURISM IN THE VALENCIAN COMMUNITY

The best known tourism both inside and outside our country is the coastal tourism, sun and beach, but since it is already more than known and amortized, the country seeks selling another type of tourism, which is increasingly in demand, which is the rural tourism. With the attractions and potential that Spain has in terms of nature, traditions, good weather, cultural heritage and gastronomy among others, it is a pity that it is not offered as an alternative option to attract tourists and to show them the other side we have in our country. Therefore, rural tourism arises in Spain due to the need of a part of society that wants to evolve and put aside the more typical tourism. This part of the tourists seek to know or get closer to some rural roots, to enjoy their holidays without overcrowding and maintaining a direct and relaxed contact with nature. This activity has helped the residents of the rural areas to notice an increase in value in their rents due to the greater influx of tourists who use the goods and services offered. This increase in products and services of tranquility and nature mean a great opportunity for the areas of interior of our country and more specifically, of the

Valencian Community to bet on activities related to natural environments, to promote products from the area and discover new experiences.

The tourist expansion has placed our community in a new position due to the recent social attitude that has stimulated the spread of travelling, the segmentation of the holiday period, increased free time and, mainly, awareness towards the conservation and enjoyment of nature and the trend towards new traditional lifestyles (Valencian Tourism Agency, 2017). The current decisions towards new interests and destinations on the part of consumers have made the Valencian tourist product offered must be in constant innovation to differentiate yourself from your national competitors. Therefore, due to these demands by part of the national market to differentiate itself and earn points, the offer of rural tourism within the Valencian Community has been growing and improving over the last years, complementing with sun and beach tourism to favour the tourism product of the community. Thus, all consumers have the option to choose and both forms of travelling are in the same conditions and with the best offer from the area in question, all of this being necessary to improve seasonality and allow entry to new market niches and then, increase the economic and social value of all the Valencian territory

The engine of development of an attractive offer will be the possibilities and variations of leisure activities ranging from cultural and monumental, based on the great value of the existing historical, artistic, architectural and ethnographic heritage, leisure sports, landscape and nature, to the traditional leisure of festivities, folklore, gastronomy and crafts. (Piqueras, 2014)

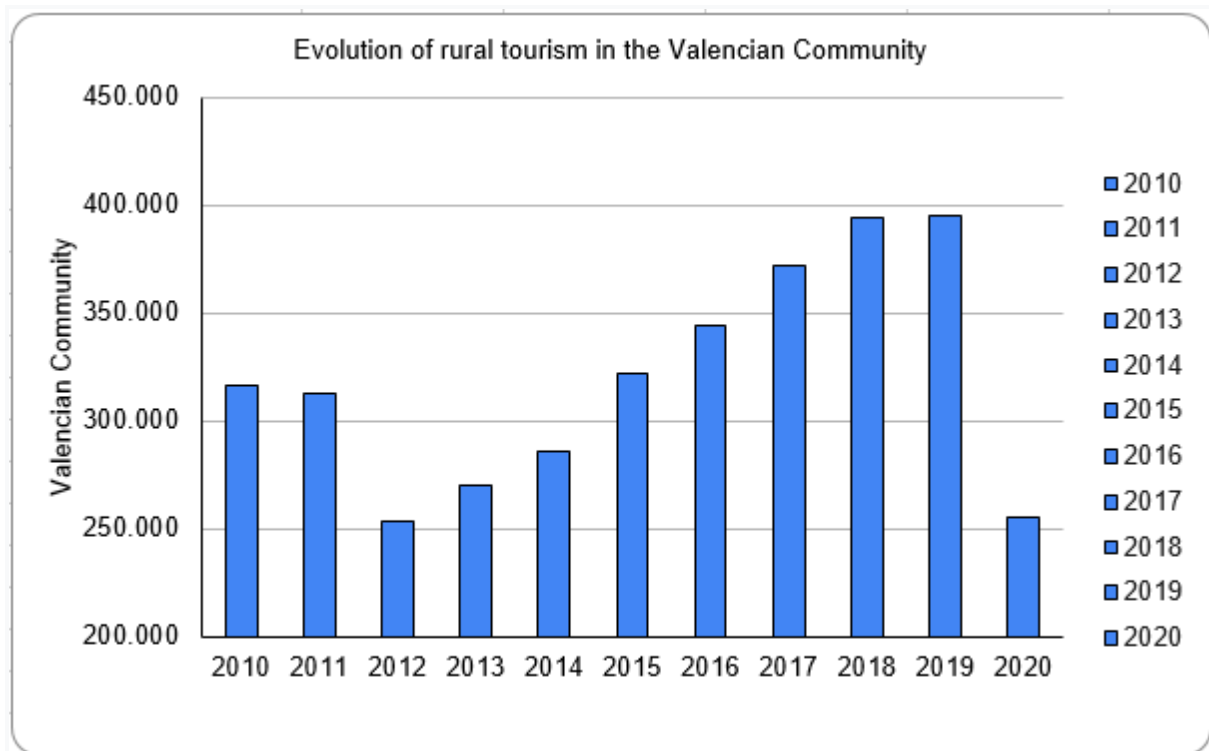
DATA ANALYSIS

- Evolution of rural tourism in the Valencian Community.

Tourism, in general, within the Valencian Community, has fluctuated differently throughout the time period chosen for the study work. We can observe both in the data and in the graph corresponding to these, that there have been years with very positive and high levels of tourism and others with lower values due to the various crises that we have suffered as a country over the years. The most significant years that we can observe in terms of low levels of tourism are the years 2012 and 2020, with the sharp decline in 2020 attributed to the current Covid-19 health crises.

If we observe the following graph made with the data extracted from the NSI that analyses the evolution of rural tourism in the Valencian territory, we can say that tourists begin to decline towards nature tourism and disconnection. In this way, this new way of practicing tourism is gaining strength and importance among the consumers creating activities by rural accommodation such as hiking, horseback riding, bicycle outings, tastings of traditional dishes, etc ... and on the other hand, there are also activities that consist of visiting protected

areas, parks natural or meet and see native animal species of the town in particular, among others.



Source: National Institute of Statistics (NSI)

If we analyse the data, we see how in the period chosen for the study, 2010-2020, there are different variations between year and year. Starting at the beginning, we see how in the year 2010 and 2011 values are practically constant, that is, rural tourism was more or less stagnant, although it is true that in 2011 there was a lower rate of tourism, the small difference being 3,341 tourists. But right after we see how, due to the economic crisis in which the country was in those years, having started in 2008 and ended in 2014, there was a sharp decline from 2010 to 2012 in terms of rural tourism since in that last year there was a financial rescue from part of the Eurogroup towards Spain due to the bad economic situation. This reason was enough so that all types of tourism and non-essential activity were declining since society and consumers had no need to invest their profits in extra activities from day to day. The decrease from 2010 to 2012 was 63,236 rural tourists.

Choosing the section composed between 2012-2018, we see how rural tourism grows each year a small portion, this being a positive fact for the Valencian Community and for Spain in general because it has a positive effect on the residents' income and of the entrepreneurs who have any kind of business in the services or goods sector, already that the question is that the economy moves and it does not stagnate. The rise of rural tourism is such that this sector goes from having 252,932 tourists in 2012 until reaching in 2018 the number of

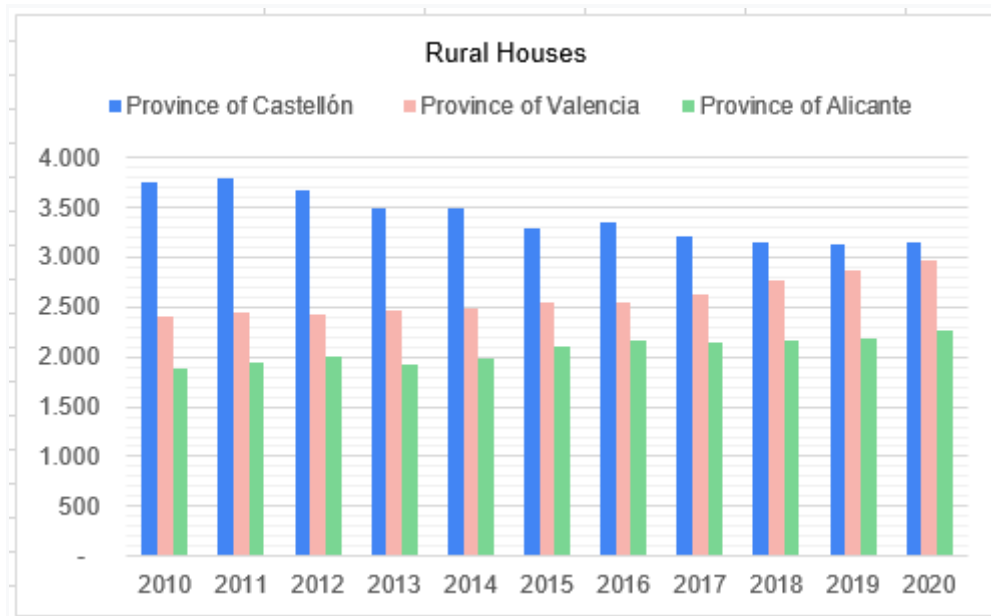
393,964 people, having a positive increase of 141,032 of rural tourists. Finally, the third section in which I have divided the graph according to the evolution of the Valencian rural tourism, 2018-2020 we see how the first two years are kept at constant levels, with practically the same number of rural tourists who have chosen the Valencian Community in that period to disconnect from the murmur of the city. But in the year 2020 it does not happen the same, as we all know, due to the health crisis we are experiencing around the world, and it still continues today. So in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, all types of tourism have fallen due to restrictions established by governments to avoid as many infections as possible, in this case we are talking about a drop of 140,000 thousand rural tourists approximately.

In general, we can say that the evolution of the rural tourism in the Valencian Community has gone, with the passing of the years, growing positively, this being a point in favour in the economy and in the social and monetary benefits of the residents and employers. On the other hand, this increase in this type of tourism It is also appreciated, since this gives rise to new places, towns, natural parks or special corners that if it wasn't for the tourists who come to meet and discover new experiences, many rural areas would be with a greater risk of depopulation than they surely possess and without any care to maintain them active.

- Rural Houses vs. Rural Hostels

The development of rural tourism has been growing from a few years ago to the present, and this has been due to changes in the tastes and needs of citizens, which are tourists at some point, and in this case, rural tourists. Due to the demand, rural towns and villages have had to build infrastructure to provide an offer that tourists can avail themselves of. This evolution can be used both to improve the state of roads and access to towns, farmhouses, etc... as in improving accommodation where to spend the night and spend a few days disconnected and surrounded by nature.

We are talking about the construction of houses or rural shelters, conceptually they are very similar, but at the same time different. When we speak of "rural house" we are talking of an independent accommodation, the entire house is usually rented for a few days on a regular basis, and it has services such as kitchen, swimming pool, garden, etc. As for the "rural hostels", they are establishments with a bed and breakfast service, usually in rooms shared with other lodgers and with some more basic features. Hostels are generally owned by the town councils of the localities, to host tourists who make routes, trekking...; and as for the rural houses, they are usually private properties with the purpose business, aimed more at families or groups of friends who are going to spend a few days disconnection in a natural and relaxed environment. As we can see in the following graphs, we see that in any of the three provinces that make up the Valencian Community, there are both houses and rural hostels, but with some notable differences between the number by province.

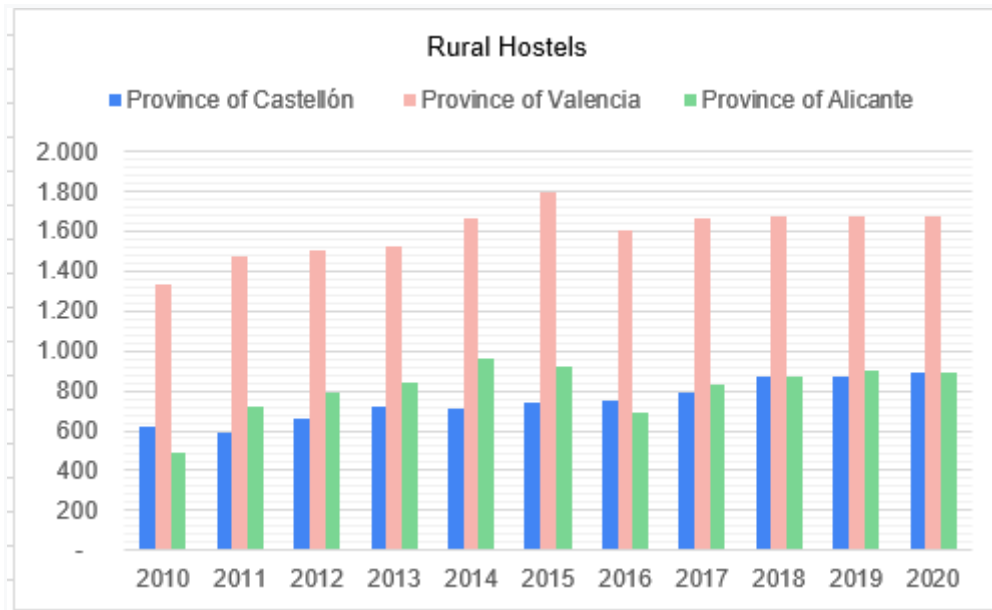


Source: Statistical Portal of the Valencian Community (SPVC)

If we analyse the previous graph, we see how the blue bars represent the number of rural houses offered in the province of Castellón; if we look at the pink ones, we see the data related to the number of rural houses available in the province of Valencia; and finally, the green bars tell us the capacity that has the province of Alicante. If we analyse the data from north to south, we see how the Castellon province is the one with the highest number of rural houses, followed by Valencia and Alicante.

Focusing on Castellón, we observe how the data shows us a decreasing trend in terms of the number of rural houses available, that is, since 2010 until 2020 this type of accommodation has decreased by 620 houses. This decline in recent years can be attributed to the growth in the supply of hotels and rental houses. In the case of province of Castellón, all existing rural houses are managed through a platform called "Turistrat", through which you can choose the inland town with the rural house that best suits your needs to spend a few days on vacation and they also offer options of experiences and attention to make your stay unbeatable.

On the contrary, if we now look at Valencia, in this province, the contrary effect has taken place, that is, in the range of years of study chosen, it has grown positively, being the difference of 549 rural houses. Alicante is the province with the least rural houses of all the Valencian Community, a fact that may be due to the fact that it is not a province with many inland towns, basing their almost complete tourist economy on the coast tourism. For this reason, we see how the average number of rural houses in Alicante is 2,071, while in the province of Valencia and Castellón they are 2,597 and 3,409 respectively.



Source: Statistical Portal of the Valencian Community (SPVC)

If we now focus on the other accommodation model that tends to predominate in the Inland areas, it means that we are talking about rural hostels. In this case, the data show us totally different results.

Starting with the province of Castellón and Alicante, we see that they have quite similar and stable values, that is, they alternate since there are years in which Alicante has a greater number of shelters and on other occasions, the opposite happens. The year 2010 is the only time in which the northern province of the Community has a greater number of hostels, this being 619 accommodations. If we analyse the period of 2011-2015, we see how Alicante is gradually increasing the number of hostels in relation to Castellón, having its highest point in 2014 with 918 accommodations. A positive difference of 205 hostels compared to the province of Castellón. Regarding the time period between 2016-2020, we see how Castellón continues its trend growing until reaching constant levels between both provinces. Although it is good it is true that Alicante had a decrease in 2016 of 58 shelters compared to the same year with Castellón, but the last three years closer to today have maintained constant levels between north and south.

Finally, we will analyse the situation in the centre of the Community, Valencia. As we have seen above, in the case of rural houses Valencia seems not to finish growing, staying fairly constant. But if we talk about the shelters, it is the province with a greater number of accommodations of this type, undoubtedly standing out above other areas of the Valencian Community. In this case, in 2010 the number of accommodations was lower than it is today, but in the intervening years there have been important ups and downs. So if we look at how construction has grown of hostels in Valencia, we see that between 2010 and 2020 the number has risen with a difference between years respectively of 336 more

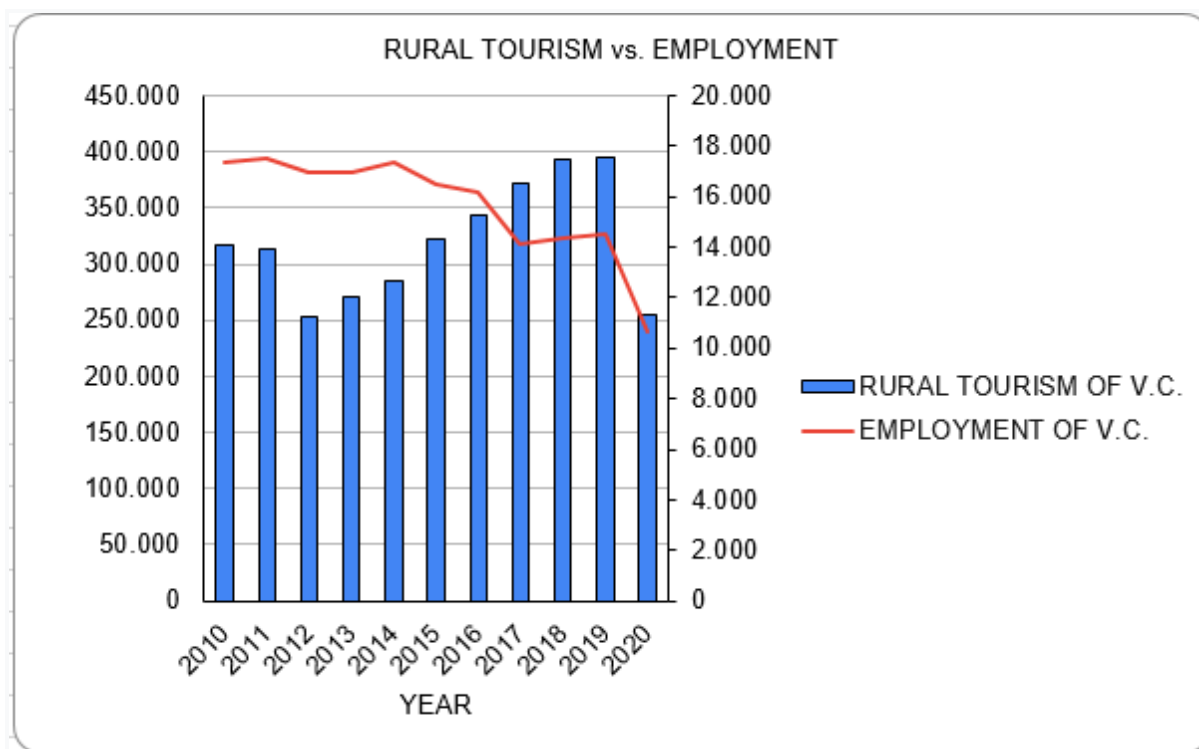
accommodations in the year 2020. If we focus on the periods in between, we see how from 2010 to 2015, the increase in number of shelters was increasing until reaching the highest point, corresponding to 2015, with a number of shelters in the province of Valencia of 1,800. It has 1,061 units more than in Castellón, and 882 units more than in Alicante. Looking now at the last section of the period chosen for study, we see how from 2015 to 2016 there were a significant decrease of 195 shelters. Finally, in the period 2016-2020 we see how the number of accommodations of this type remains constant in the province Valencian.

In conclusion, for the three provinces the years 2014-2015 are the ones with the greatest boom there were in terms of shelters, being able to attribute this fact to the situation of improvement after the economic crisis that the country had gone through, ending in 2014. From this form, Spanish society and in this case, Valencian, began to recover from the bad economic years and could afford a little getaway in the countryside. In the case of rural houses, the same situation also occurred as the one named previously, but in this case the province of Castellón did not increase its number of accommodations, this could be because it was the province that had the most negative impact due to the economic crisis since most of Castellón's industry is based on the sector ceramics industry and it suffered a lot during the crisis due to the real estate "boom".

- Comparison between rural tourism and employment.

Rural tourism accommodation establishments are those that, corresponding to the requirements established according to the applicable regulations, are dedicated to offer accommodations to tourists through their services available that are located in rural areas with construction and integration characteristics typical of the environment. And on the other hand, it is considered tourist employment, in this case, within rural tourism, the group of people who are working, whatever the job is, in a company in the tourism sector.

The following graph shows the comparison between rural tourism and employment, that is, between the tourism that lands in any inland or rural territory of the Valencian Community and the employment that this tourism generates, since it is necessary to cover minimum services. We can see that the line that represents employment follows a different trajectory than the bars in the graph that indicate rural tourism in each year of study, between 2010 and 2020. In the time period composed from 2010 to 2016 we see how employment is above the number of tourists, this means that there was a lower influx of tourists in relation to the number of people hired in rural areas due to the economic crisis and also due to that rural tourism in those years was not as booming as it is today or since 3-4 years ago. If we now focus on the last stretch, 2017-2020, we observe more sharply the fall in employment that has been dragging since the beginning study, but in recent years this decline has been accentuated. For this reason, we see as the line representing employment is below the bars that represents rural tourism, or what is the same, tourism is greater than the staff employed for it.



Source: National Institute of Statistics (NSI)

The years 2017-2018 continue the growing tendency of the previous years in terms of tourists and declining in terms of employment; but we observe how in 2019 there is a stagnation of this positive trend so that 2018-2019 remain at constant levels and equal in terms of number of rural tourists, but in terms of the hired staff, there is a small increase between 2017 and 2019, being 360 more covered work positions. The most important decrease of all the years of study, apart from the attributed to the economic-financial crisis of 2012, is that of the last year, decreasing the number of tourists in 139,939 and the personnel employed in 3,821; sector very affected by the global pandemic in which we still find ourselves.

From the beginning of our temporal analysis (2010) to 2019, we see how the number of people employed thanks to rural tourism has fallen by 2,847 employees. Looking at the number of tourists who increasingly choose the rural environment to spend a few days of holidays and disconnect, this has been increasing over time, growing from 2010 to 2019 in 78,798 thousand tourists. If we analyse until the last section (2020), we see as the decline in employment is much greater, being 6,668 workers, having to attribute this abrupt fall to the great health crisis of 2020 due to the Covid-19; and for the same reason we can attribute the loss of so many rural tourists in the Valencian Community, this loss amounting to 61,141 travellers.

In general, the ratio of rural tourists and the jobs covered by this motive does not have a positive relationship nor are they coordinated in the same trend, since the employment has a

negative trend and on the contrary, the number of rural tourists each time is bigger. The fact that these two variables do not go hand in hand is because on many occasions, and more so in the hotel and tourism sector, the contracts of the employees are temporary and very few permanent, since it is possible that at certain times of the year like Easter or summer, that the weather also accompanies more and it is when the population usually have their longest holiday periods, the number of people hired in rural areas can increase because they expect more influx, but the rest of the year these contracts decrease and therefore there are fewer people employed. This fact not only happens in this type of tourism, but in the sun and beach it also happens frequently. It may be also due to the fact that the number of hostels is the province of Valencia (an area with the largest number of population) is greater than that of rural houses, implying in terms of accommodation less need for employees due to its more basic characteristics.

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this work has been to analyse the evolution of rural tourism in the Valencian Community together with the risk of depopulation suffered by different municipalities, being the province of Castellón the most affected. To be able to combat this depopulation, local entities are important, since they are the ones who exert the most force they can exert to revitalise and improve the conditions of a half-abandoned territory, being an essential element to defend the very existence of the peoples.

The rural environment from the point of view of the Valencian Community, has experienced a diversification in the rural economy since the agricultural sector shares space with new sectors such as rural tourism, the agri-food industry and other services such as conservation, recovery and use of heritage activities, among others. The agricultural exploitations of the interior of the Valencian Community have as characteristic to emphasise that in many occasions they are of family scope and therefore, the work camps are small in size; on the other hand, the high average age of the population and the low levels of training in the sector mean that this work activity is see conditioned to improve their productivity.

In relation to depopulation in the Valencian Community, it is considered necessary to make the rural environment a space full of life projects and that guarantees equality of rights of its inhabitants with the rest of the citizenship. In short, the guarantee of provision of quality public services, appropriate to the characteristics specific to rural areas, focusing on education, health, social services and citizen security is essential for the equality of all citizens.

To enhance the possibilities of the rural Valencian territory in terms of tourism, the implementation of rural accommodation is essential, a fact that is being carried out thanks to platforms that help to publicize the offer of rural accommodation. Regarding the ratio of rural tourists and employment, they do not follow the same trend, since employment has a

negative trend and on the contrary, the number of rural tourists each time is greater, and this is due to the fact that in many cases employees' contracts are temporary.

Finally, rural tourism and depopulation are closely linked since one thing leads to the other and it helps the employment and earnings of its residents. Both concepts are developing favorably within the Valencian Community to reach a promising future.

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