

**THE INTERPLAY OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY, ETHICAL TOURISM,
AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMY****Mercedes AZNAR, Prof., PhD**

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Abstract

Post-COVID tourism must be framed within a new paradigm that embraces the values of sustainability with a triple impact (economic, but also environmental and social) as opposed to the immediacy of economic income. The circularity of the economy and social innovation become fundamental axes on which to build the pillars of a new tourism. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that this is possible through the Social Economy. To this end, evidence will be presented on two initiatives worked on by our research group on social innovation and inclusive business over several years. Firstly, an experience developed with the indigenous community of the Nasa Council in Cali (Colombia) governed by a matriarchal system; and secondly, another one in a small village in central Spain, an area with serious problems of rural depopulation. Through two models of the Social Economy, a successful experience has been achieved that has lasted over time. Therefore, it is possible to combine social innovation with tourism to achieve full sustainability in destinations.

Keywords: *sustainability, social economy, rurality, women, responsible tourism*

1. Introduction

The post-COVID era brought a significant number of studies on the need for a paradigm shift in the tourism sector after having seen the tremendous blow they experienced during the pandemic; and also on the risk if such a shift did not take place. Three years later, it may seem that the pandemic never existed, as the sector is once again focused on increasing tourism scores and indices at all costs. On the other hand, the confinement meant that, once over, people felt an even greater need to travel despite the international situation at all levels. In fact, international tourism grew by 102% in 2022 [1]. And in a country like Spain, where tourism accounts for more than 12% of GDP, all parties involved in the sector have focused all their efforts on increasing the number of visitors in order to achieve the highest possible rates of income, especially after the enormous losses that confinement meant for the sector. If we focus on the Autonomous Community of Valencia, in the eastern Mediterranean region comprising the provinces of Valencia, Alicante and Castellón (an eminently touristic region), in 2022 there was an increase of 114.1% in international tourists which, in turn, meant an

increase in tourist expenditure of 131%. What is more, analysing the accumulated figures up to February 2023, we have already noted a 42.9% increase in the number of tourists and a 42.1% increase in expenditure, compared to the same period in 2022. In other words, we are once again starting to talk about massive waves of tourists to Mediterranean tourist destinations, and in particular, to this region of the country [2, 3].

On the other hand, the closure of borders during the pandemic led people to seek out rural destinations in their eagerness to travel, this time to natural, open destinations, to mitigate possible contagion. And after the pandemic, the trend has continued:

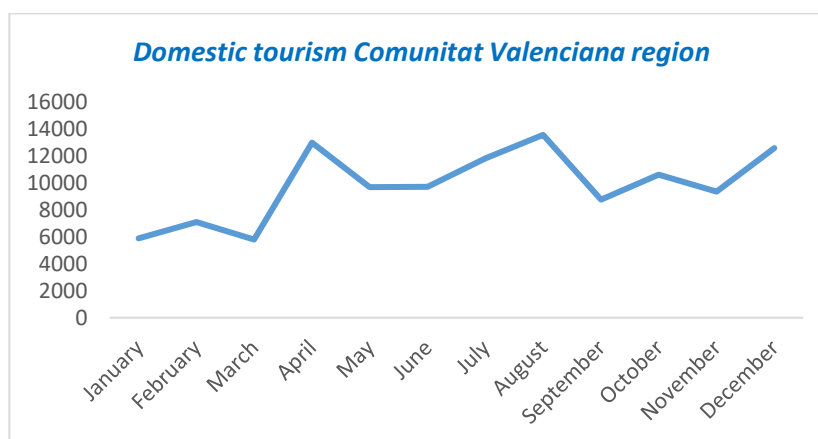


Figure 1. Domestic tourism in rural destinations-Comunitat Valenciana region 2022

Source: author

This means a significant increase in the number of visitors, both national and international, with both positive and negative consequences for the rural environment and its historical and natural heritage.

In Spain, domestic tourism was officially supported during the period of international restrictions, but this segment was soon forgotten when they were lifted. Similarly, domestic tourists soon forgot how good it was to visit and get to know their own country or territory (and thus help disadvantaged rural or inland territories) as soon as they were able to travel outside Spain again.

However, despite these figures, we cannot ignore the fact that 2023 is still a year of great uncertainty for all business sectors, particularly for the tourism sector [4]. On an international level, there are three major threats that could have a significant influence on the family economy, such as the increase in inflation, the possible evolution of the war in Ukraine, and the rise in interest rates with more expensive debt. On the other hand, there is a major challenge that the sector should face in Spain, namely, the dignity of the jobs associated with the tourism sector with the development of quality training and education.

There is no doubt that, in the face of so much risk, the tourism stakeholders focus on increasing visitors and, therefore, income through the culture of "just in case". However, this is a vision doomed to failure. It is clear that the sector has already forgotten the problems that arose shortly before COVID-19 due to mass tourism. These led to the environmental and cultural deterioration of destinations, of the tourist experience, of the quality of the visitor experience and, consequently, to the development of an anti-tourist feeling among residents in

the face of hordes of uncontrolled and, in many cases, very rude and disrespectful tourists, towards the destination and its inhabitants. Therefore, we are currently faced with a very short term vision of economic benefits that cannot bring anything positive in the medium and long term [5]. This is particularly acute in the case of natural destinations where the hordes of tourists also push the resident to other hidden spots where visitors do not flock [6]; they have to compete with tourists to enjoy their natural environments and, in most cases, suffer the consequences of their degradation. With the pandemic and the international closing of borders, nature tourism experienced a boom in Spain that led to the overcrowding of these destinations. History always reminds us that people tend to forget crises early on in order to be quickly carried away by a supposed return to normality [7].

It is sad to note that the sector does not seem to have paid attention to the obvious warning signs that began to emerge in 2018 and whose examples we can recall in such serious cases as Venice, Majorca or Dubrovnik (where UNESCO threatened to withdraw the designation of cultural world heritage site if measures were not taken). It is serious to note that already in 1978, Pizam [8] predicted that a substantial increase in the number of visitors to a tourist destination leads to dissatisfaction of the host community and is reflected in negative attitudes. Forty years later, a new term was coined in the face of the sector's inattention and short-termism, i.e. overtourism. However, it is also unacceptable to promote a decline in tourism without further ado, as this would impoverish millions of people who depend on the sector for their livelihoods. A balanced approach is therefore imperative for the development of sustainable tourism in which measures are taken towards the recognition of the tourist's right to travel but also, the resident's right to a quality of life.

On the other hand, another major threat to the sector is climate change and hence the need to comply with the 2030 Agenda and triple-impact sustainability (economic, environmental and social). Although the sector publicly subscribes to these mandates, the inconsistencies are evident. Recently, a document of *Business Priorities Proposals 2023* by the Tourism Commission of the Valencian Business Confederation was published [9] in which 26 proposals were presented to all political parties in view of the general elections scheduled for July 2023 in Spain. The following should be highlighted from this document:

- None refer to the need to reconcile with the resident.
- None refer to the human factor as the backbone of the tourism experience.
- Only one refers to sustainability, although it deals with economic intelligence and big data, so it is simply tackling revenue.
- Only one refers to the dignity of employment in the sector.
- Only one refers to the need for the tourism sector and academia to work together to create and adapt qualifications and training curricula. However, when higher education institutions want to raise them, the sector does not seem to pay attention probably because they have other issues in mind they consider more relevant, i.e. measurement and revenue.
- Only one refers to the potential of the sector to alleviate depopulation, promoting rural destinations and avoiding seasonality. However, the focus is still on sun and beach tourism, which is what generates the rapid and short-term revenue.

Qualifications as well as rurality and depopulation are topics that are only tackled during election campaigns, but once the elections are over, these issues are put aside, especially in

tourism. It is not in vain that Spain is a country that does not have a Ministry of Tourism as such (nor obviously a Council of Tourism, at regional government level) despite the fact that in 2022 the tourism sector accounted for 12.2% of GDP (15.8% in the Valencian Community).

Undoubtedly, we can no longer continue like this and, therefore, a change is needed towards the real fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals where the circular economy is key together with responsible tourism. Thus, the Social Economy and, in particular, the cooperative movement, become the vehicle that brings together the three factors, as it has been doing so since its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century. The Social Economy plays an important role in the fight against poverty and contributes to the performance of more dignified and decent jobs; on the other hand, it helps to create employment, particularly in economic sectors or geographical regions where conventional enterprises would find it difficult to generate a shareholder value that would allow them to operate at a profit. It is therefore the ideal system for rural areas because it can help reverse the phenomenon of depopulation; for women because it helps fight inequality; and for youth because it promotes innovative and social entrepreneurship. Furthermore, by putting social cohesion at the forefront, the resident and the host community are valued and respected. This is vital for a quality and sustainable tourism experience as there can be no sustainable tourism without respect for the resident.

This paper will first explore the importance of the circular economy in the tourism sector. It will then focus on the rise of digitalisation and technology and the risk of dehumanisation of the tourism experience. Finally, it will stress the fact that responsible and triple-impact tourism can be a reality and will present examples of good practices in Colombia and Spain worked on by the social research and inclusive business group of our university institution.

2. The degree of research at the present time

Ellen MacArthur Foundation [10] defines the circular economy as the preservation and enhancement of natural capital, controlling finite stocks and balancing renewable resource flows. Therefore, natural capital becomes the key concept with the understanding that production systems should match their operation to nature, where the waste that is generated becomes the food and source of growth for other elements of flora and fauna. Evidently, it is more circular and sustainable to reduce and reuse than to recycle: on the one hand, the consumption of resources and the production of waste is reduced, and on the other hand, the waste is reused as a product [11]. Nevertheless, it is not easy to change to a system so drastically different from the established uses of the linear model firmly rooted among the business community. This change forces companies to rethink everything from the way they design and manufacture their products to their relationships with suppliers and customers. And probably for this very reason, there are many challenges that they themselves see for this possible implementation, ranging from a greater financial risk, compared to the linear model, to the difficulty of promoting practices consistent with the concept of circularity among tourists. It is then essential to focus on the social dimension of its implementation [12, 13, 14]. Despite the benefits of the circular approach, it cannot be a successful initiative if companies do not understand the real benefits of the circular economy and know the capabilities and

technology needed for the paradigm shift. In other words, there are many theoretical analyses, but it is essential to ground the theory so that, in a pragmatic way, companies see the imperative need to move from the linear to the circular economy. And, of course, the help of public administrations (whether local, regional, national, or European) in the form of readily available funds is essential; that is, eliminating all the bureaucratic hurdles of the state machinery that make it almost impossible to obtain these funds, as is currently the case in Spain.

The Spanish Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism developed a practical guide for the application of the circular economy in the tourism sector in the aftermath of the pandemic [15]. It set out a series of circularity measures to be considered by tourism businesses:

- Reducing the use of non-renewable energy and resources.
- Self-production of energy from renewable sources.
- Choice of recycled consumer products.
- Supply of local and seasonal products.
- Minimising waste generation in tourist facilities.
- Implementation of zero plastic waste actions.
- Optimised water management.
- Implementation of building or restoration projects that allow for the reuse and recycling of materials.

However, many of these aspects conflict with reality, as for example, what would happen to the globalisation of the economy, if we focus on local and seasonal markets. Or how to minimise the generation of resources if we do not educate tourists so that their negative impact on the destination is definitely curbed. Or how to manage water properly if we do not first take into account the visitor absorption capacity of the tourist destination, which becomes a fundamental axis of responsible tourism and deepens the need to seek quality tourism instead of mass tourism. This would only be bread for today and hunger for tomorrow; and as mentioned above, the sector in Spain does not seem to have learnt anything from the pandemic.

The post-COVID scenario poses two key factors to be regarded. Firstly, eco-sustainability and the effects of climate change make the tourism sector particularly vulnerable. They can lead to changes in tourist flows, due to the appearance of new warmer areas, and even to the devastation of infrastructures such as in coastal areas as a result of rising sea levels or in mountainous areas owing to the scarcity of snow. Secondly, the technological revolution with automation, the use of robotics, artificial intelligence, etc., is taking hold. Entrepreneurs in the sector are aware of the challenges they face and of the benefits of the circular economy, but they lack collective action at the destination that can be channelled into specific actions to be articulated in a plan [16]. In short, a pragmatic and team approach is pursued with action plans agreed by all parties and with efficient resource management, which is what ultimately shapes the competitiveness of a tourist destination and is therefore key to the livelihood of the sector and triple-impact sustainability.

The importance of the tourism sector in the creation of employment and economic wealth cannot be doubted, but the tourism activity still develops at the expense of destination communities, putting them under considerable pressure from the negative consequences of

tourism [17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23]. The socio-cultural aspect of responsible tourism cannot be neglected in the pursuit of sustainable tourism. The residents of the local community will only appreciate the real benefits of responsible tourism if they perceive that the outcome of tourism actions improves their quality of life and well-being. It is with good reason that responsible tourism highly values the promotion of local art and culture, traditions, natural heritage, indigenous styles, and everything the resident possesses. As a result, a sense of pride and value is generated among community members towards their own cultural heritage. And this is reflected in the tourism experience because it brings the resident and visitor together to offer an authentic and quality experience.

In terms of technological development, reference has been made earlier in this paper to the importance of implementing the latest trends in technology in the tourism sector. On the one hand, it helps to develop certain circularity measures already mentioned and, on the other, to focus on a target market that is constantly changing. One cannot compare the tourist belonging to the Spanish baby-boom generation (1960s when there was a significant demographic increase in the country) with the millennials or generation Z, to mention a few examples. Their perceptions, lifestyles, and use of technology vary considerably. Consequently, demand must be met, but always without neglecting the customer in its most general version. In fact, it cannot be forgotten that the human touch is and will always be absolutely necessary and, therefore, technology will be an important support for the tourism experience, although it can never replace people. Undoubtedly, technologies linked to Big Data will be very important, as they will allow us to better understand the market segments and have a direct impact on them in order to influence in some way their travel decision making. Additionally, this would enable to attract visitors that generate more value and sustainability to the destination, and not only in terms of income. Responsible and quality tourism should always be the ultimate goal.

In the luxury hotel sector, personalisation is a key business driver [24]. The customer will seek information and options through social media or any other digital network, but they will always want access to the human touch during their service engagement process. Consequently, there is a balance to be struck between automation of customer service processes and an exquisite personal touch; the customer should always feel pampered by the people offering a service rather than having to deal with automated systems that, on too many occasions, do not respond to demands. The introduction of digitalisation and automation will only serve to damage the establishment's image unless they are able to ensure several factors:

- that they will always have a support team to solve any technical problem immediately;
- that the technology introduced is user-friendly and, therefore, the customer does not see it as an obstacle in their experience;
- and that their system will not be hacked, with its many implications in terms of the privacy of the guests' data.

The tourism sector must be very careful in the application of technology to avoid a loss of spontaneity in the destination. If we do not rely on human capital, technology will be the new enemy, because without humanism there is no quality tourism experience.

However, when addressing technology in tourism, we must go further and hence the importance of the development of the *Smart Tourism Destination* concept. The Spanish

Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism has promoted a model of smart tourist destination with the aim of managing destinations in a more efficient and sustainable way, increasing tourism profitability and boosting the competitiveness of the Spanish economy. The aim is to apply the necessary technology and innovation to destinations in order to improve accessibility for visitors and the quality of life of residents, as improving the life of citizens is essential to improving the tourist experience. However, from the beginning, smart has been identified with technology, which has meant that the human factor has not been the cornerstone of tourist activity and, consequently, the well-being of residents has not been considered. Hence the outbreaks of tourist phobia that peaked shortly before the pandemic and which had been building up over the last few years. Nevertheless, the Spanish Association for Standardisation and Certification (AENOR for its Spanish acronym) [25] issued a standard for application in the tourism sector that relates the circular economy to the management of a smart destination; in addition, this standard proposes a series of indicators to measure sustainability in its environmental dimension. As can be seen, this norm does not prioritise triple-impact sustainability, but it is an important step forward. Obviously, not all tourism companies have this seal, nor do they apply for it, because the requirements are varied and strict.

Smart destinations should be understood as achieving valuable visitors. All stakeholders should adopt the same principles and also work together with higher education institutions to train tourism professionals who advocate sustainability and, above all, seek to promote the values of respect and customer solidarity in the destination. The Kaunas City Agency in Lithuania is an example to follow, where tourists are considered as citizens, i.e., they have the same rights, but also the same obligations as residents. It is not possible to continue with the motto of “everything goes” in front of the visitor. If tourists look for authenticity, they will have no problem to pay premium.

Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed in the sector where the key values of respect, ethics, solidarity, and equity are the basis on which the tourism experience is built. Namely, these values identify the cooperative world and the Social Economy.

3. Methods and materials applied

The aim of the work presented here is to show that the values inherent in the Social Economy, and in cooperativism in particular, are a fundamental pillar for the development of disadvantaged communities. The key value of triple-impact sustainability (economic, social and environmental) has remained the backbone on which to develop the initiatives described below. To this end, our work focuses on three fundamental pillars: rurality and depopulation, disadvantaged communities, and women and youth as the backbone of small communities.

In order to achieve their success, it has been vital to provide entrepreneurial training for the groups involved, as well as to raise awareness and social cohesion in order to increase self-esteem and a sense of belonging. This has been possible thanks to the use of different social innovation tools such as the *DES* methodology, which will be described below, or *Café del Mundo*, a specific focus group model that encourages collaborative and innovative participation and which, without using this technical name at the time of its development, allows for an environment of participatory freedom.

4. Results and discussions

Firstly, it is essential to understand the concept of sustainability in tourism with a broader focus. The application of circularity measures will be key to achieving this, but it is necessary to go further and ensure that these measures help to achieve sustainability throughout the country. That is to say, to seek territorial solidarity through the distribution of the territory in order to spread the tourist flow and prevent it from being absorbed in a single municipality and its likely negative impact. This would avoid overcrowding, the consequent degradation of the destination, and the impoverishment of other areas of the country that are not targeted by the tourist market. The ultimate objective would be sustainable territorial development and tourism would be a key tool to achieve it.

What is evident is that if businesses are not sustainable, tourism cannot be sustainable. This is good news, as there are signs that, in some cases, the sector is moving towards a Social Economy perspective to achieve triple-impact sustainability. For instance, in Finland they do not speak of sustainable tourism but of sustainable destination and, at the level of residents, of social cohesion, as evidenced by the Tourism Director of the Head of Unit City Helsinki during the *3rd World Conference on Smart Destinations*, which took place in Valencia (Spain) in November 2022. In other words, there is a qualitative leap towards the well-being of the country itself and its citizens through the tourism experience.

In a way, it is feasible to say that globalisation has damaged the sector significantly, as it has led to overcrowding and has made many destinations look alike, so that tourists can no longer differentiate between them in many cases (especially in the sun and beach segment). For this reason, it is very important to recover and focus on the identity of each town, on its roots, which is what attracted the first tourist flows since ancient times. Economic pressure is important, but if we go back to the pre-pandemic model, there will be no change. In Spain, it is particularly problematic because what attracted the first tourist flows in the 1960s was the sun and beach; and that has continued to be promoted, and exploited, to excess (even uncontrollably, at times). Hence, in some destinations, this identity has been lost. For example, Benidorm (Alicante) has gone from being a small fishing village to an environment of huge buildings (some of them skyscrapers) where the only objective is to generate income from tourism; there are no longer any fishermen or the reality of what it was as a town in the past. On the other hand, it is also necessary to be careful with smoke and mirrors, hence the rise of *green washing*, i.e., pretending to be very green in company policy through image and communication, but not being true to the core of it.

Solidarity and equity along with the achievement of benefits are possible through tourism. In fact, pilot experiences with responsible tourism have been carried out in places such as Kerala (India). Considering that this type of tourism is a valuable tool in favour of poverty eradication and sustainable development, these experiences resulted in an increase in the quality of life and sustainability in the destination. Therefore, the effective implementation of the SDGs through tourism is a tangible reality.

We will present now the outcomes of the two projects developed in two very different geographical areas: an indigenous community in Colombia and a small rural municipality in Spain. The objective has always been respect for the community, its inhabitants, its traditions and way of life, and the creation of decent and sustainable employment that, in turn,

contributes to the economic sustainability of the local community; always bearing in mind respect and care for the natural and cultural heritage, as well as social cohesion and the increase of the resident's self-esteem.

1. Bringing solutions to the indigenous community of the Nasa Council in Cali, Colombia



Data on urban and rural population in Colombia practically reversed over the last century: in 1938 about 30% of the country's population lived in urban areas whereas by the end of the last century the proportion was almost 70%. And the trend has continued into the new millennium. In fact, in 2022, only 23.7% of the country's population, or 12.2 million people, lived in rural areas of Colombia (DANE, National Administrative Department of Statistics by its Spanish acronym, 2022) [26]:

Table 1. Rural demographics development in Colombia 1938-2022

Year	Rural Zone Population (%)	Urban Zone Population (%)
1938	70%	30%
2000	30%	70%
2022	23.7%	76.3%

Source: authors

These demographic data show how the forced displacement in recent decades represents a major threat in the case of indigenous communities, whose economic, social and cultural systems are based entirely on their relationship with the land. Such displacement destroys ancestral ways of life, social structures, languages and identities, and can ultimately lead to the disappearance of entire indigenous communities. More seriously, upon arrival in cities, indigenous communities face racism and discrimination, which, in most cases, leads to poverty and marginalisation, especially for women, as they face double discrimination: as indigenous and as women. Therefore, the political, social and economic exclusion of indigenous women, particularly in urban contexts, contributes to a permanent situation of structural discrimination, which puts women at the centre of all kinds of violence against them.

This paper therefore proposes the need to transform the core of the cultural and economic systems of exclusion and discrimination, designing a strategy of differential empowerment for the women of the indigenous cabildo of Cali, Colombia. This will range from the recognition of collective identities and rights to the creation of cooperatives that allow for economic autonomy on the basis of the promotion of difference and cultural diversity.

Next, a description will be provided of the process developed in the department of Valle del Cauca, Colombia, with women from the Nasa indigenous council. Under the umbrella of the Social Economy, these women managed to create and consolidate three cooperative enterprises that have become a stable source of income for them and their families. Moreover, they have consolidated themselves as an effective strategy for surviving the conditions of exclusion under which they have to survive: their poverty, their ethnicity, and their gender. Furthermore, it has allowed them to recover the cultural idiosyncrasy of their council through the production and promotion of handicraft products closely linked to their identity.

This initiative has been developed using the *Differential Empowerment Strategy* (DES) methodology [27], which proposes to address social and economic gaps in a holistic, inclusive, and gendered way. To this end, the focus is on using a conceptual framework of local development and social innovation based on the principles of epistemic justice and the ecology of knowledge. For this purpose, an entrepreneurial project has been launched with 20 women from the Nasa community who have devised, developed and structured their initiatives from their cultural identity, based on their own knowledge and the traditions of their people in order to promote their economic autonomy.

To ensure the success of these initiatives, they have been trained in the fundamentals of social entrepreneurship, from the initial concept phase to the creation and development of the business plan. The result has been the creation of three cooperatives:

- *Las Gaitanas*, dedicated to the manufacture of unique textiles that preserve the ancestral identity of the community.
- *Empanadas Sol Nasa*, where fast food is prepared based on the traditional products of the Nasa people gastronomy.
- *Chicha El Maíz*, which produces and distributes this ancestral drink (*chicha*, an alcoholic beverage resulting from the fermentation of maize in sugar water), with the best quality maize.

This obviously attracts visitors drawn by the power and strength of an ancestral indigenous community. The community can sustain itself by selling its unique and quality products which, on the other hand, puts the focus on this group of people to the outside world so that they can survive in dignified conditions.

The impact of these initiatives has been very positive in their perception of themselves as protagonists of their reality, has made them reconnect with their traditions, and has allowed them to contribute materially and culturally to their community. As a result, they have been able to improve community relations and generate collective strength through the empowerment that has come from emotional and economic autonomy. The use of the cooperative business model has enabled the establishment of social and solidarity-based enterprises in harmony with the ideals and principles based on the cultural values of their ancestral community; values that always foreground their vital connection to nature (the mother Earth, as they call it) and therefore imply respect for its sustainability. For communities like this one, the circular economy is simply their ancestral way of life.

From this point onwards, monitoring will be carried out to ensure that the three co-operatives continue to meet the objectives for which they have been created. Work will also continue through the launch of new initiatives in other indigenous and disadvantaged communities in Latin America.

2. *Tourism as a lifeline in depopulated Spain*

The phenomenon of depopulation in rural environments has never ceased increasing since its beginnings with the First Industrial Revolution, which caused a significant exodus to industrialised urban areas. Eurostat's latest report on demographic changes in the European Union territory [28] reveals disturbing data:

Table 2. Rural demographics development in the EU_2015-2020

Younger population (< 20 years)	-0.66%
Working age (20-64 years)	-0.63
Older (≥ 65 years)	1.80%

Source: authors

As can be seen, there is still a worrying increase in the number of young people leaving rural areas in search of employment and a better quality of life (although in many cases they simply swell the unemployment figures in the urban areas where they settle). It is also particularly worrying to see working-age people leaving rural areas, especially women who are the pillar of the family and therefore of population growth, as has always been the case in small rural towns. In total, only 21% of the population lives in rural areas and the downward trend is ongoing.

In the case of Spain, the data are revealing, with a 0.85% drop in the number of young people under the age of 20 and a worrying 0.86% drop in the active population. It is thus urgent to take measures to reverse this situation and continue to give life to rural environments, which, after all, represent the primary sector that supplies urban areas (although it may seem that those in power do not quite understand this).

Our research group has focused on a small village in Soria, Garray. Soria is a particular spot in the centre of Spain, which suffers one of the highest rates of rural depopulation. In just over a century, it has lost 40% of its population at the provincial level; if we focus on the small villages scattered throughout the municipality, some have even disappeared. Most of them have fewer than 8 inhabitants per square kilometre, which is why this province is also known as the ground zero of depopulation in Spain.

Garray is a small village rich in natural and cultural heritage. Its Celtiberian origins provide an important added value for the survival of the community; in fact, it has one of the most important archaeological sites in Spain, which had not been highlighted adequately until now.



The demographic trend has been significantly reversed thanks to the efforts of residents united through another type of Social Economy entity, the Associations. This work began at the end of the 20th century, and it is being still monitored and supported today. With the aim of halting the relentless depopulation of the community, in 1998 a small group of young people promoted the creation of Celtiberian historical re-enactments involving all the residents. The objective was to attract attention in order to appeal to possible visitors who would provide a flow of income. The initiative was a success, and it was decided to repeat the re-enactment annually free of charge. Over the years, more residents decided to take part in these activities and a small increase in the number of inhabitants started to be noticed. For this reason, we promoted the decision to create a non-profit cultural association (in 2003) that adopted several fundamental objectives:

- The safeguarding of the town by attracting, and settling, population.
- The promotion of a sense of community among all residents.
- The promotion and preservation of the historic Celtiberian heritage located there.
- The attraction of visitors that will help in the economic sustainability of the village.

The impact has been highly positive in terms of demographic evolution, as can be seen below:

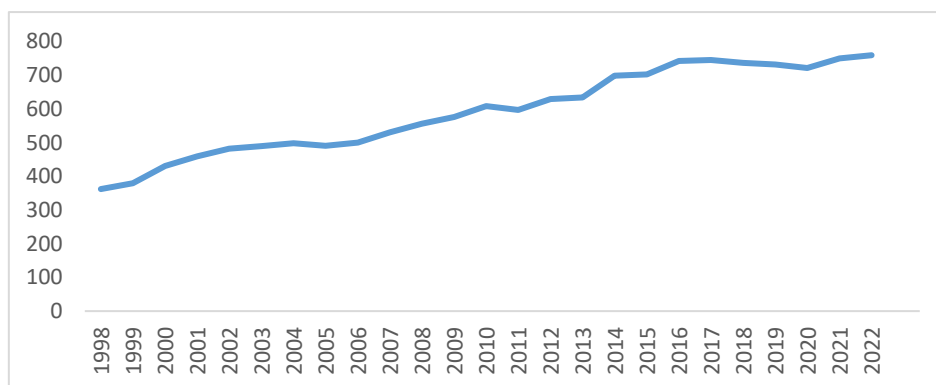


Figure 2. Population change 1998-2022

Source: authors

It is important to highlight the increase in the number of families, which is rising the number of births, a richness for any rural environment. In fact, 17.7% are under 18 years old (11% are children from 0 to 10 years old); 66.5% are people between 18 and 65 years old (working age range); and 15.8% are over 65 years old.

Another important point we took into account was sustainable development at the economic level, as the options that existed before the creation of the association were scarce to generate stable employment in the community:

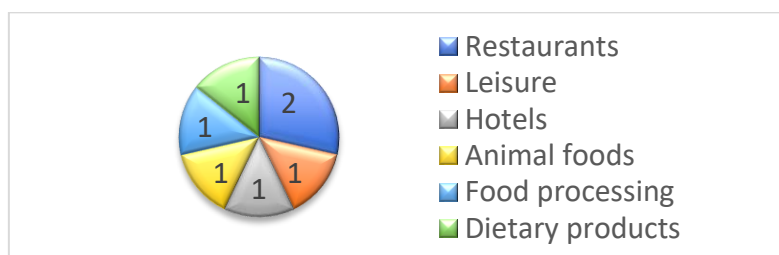


Figure 3. Number of companies before 2003

Source: authors

Following the creation of the association and the attraction of tourists to the village and thus of residents who decided to take up residence in the community, assistance was given in the promotion of entrepreneurial initiatives developed by young local people. These provided employment mainly for residents and covered the whole spectrum of needs for both community members and the visitors they sought to attract. The result is evident, as shown in the figure below:

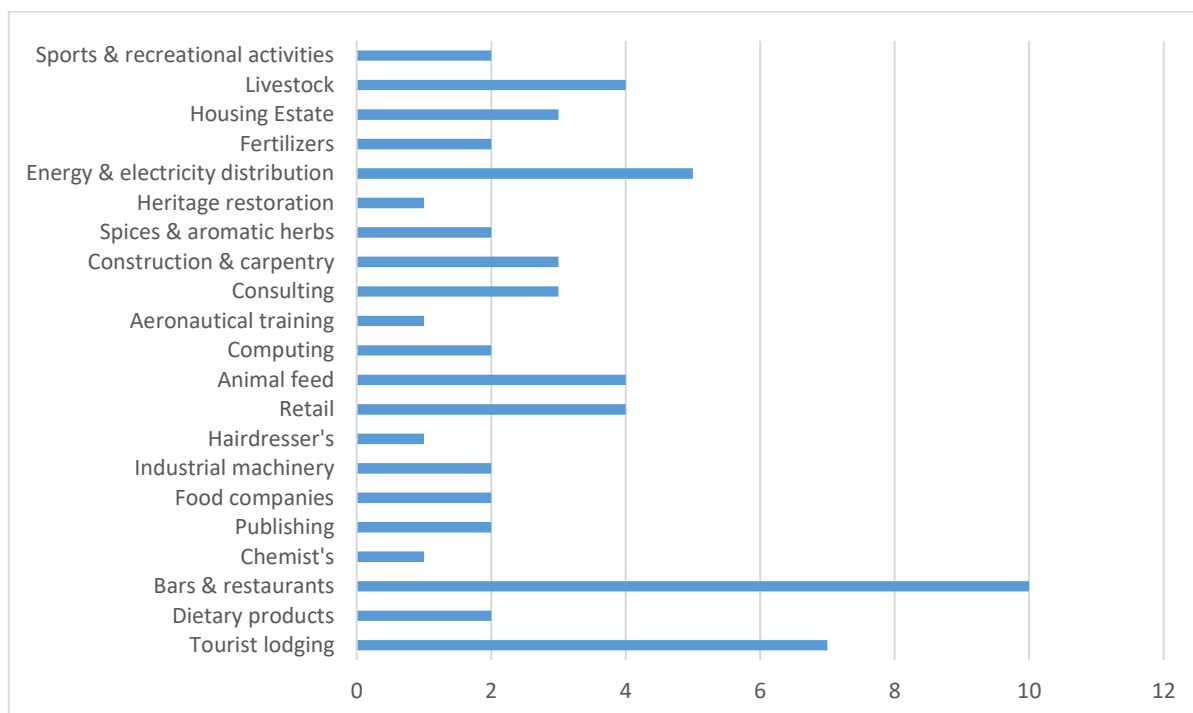


Figure 4. Evolution of enterprise development 2003-2022

Source: author

There has been a significant increase of 1000% in the creation of companies, from 6 companies in 2003 to 63 in 2022.

As for the number of tourists, up to March 2023 there was an increase of 13.7% compared to the same period in 2022: +14% of domestic tourists and +12.1% of international tourists. To promote overnight stays, the new entrepreneurs were encouraged to join the same project based on:

- Promoting the local and Celtiberian gastronomic tradition.
- Promoting local and Celtiberian handicrafts.
- Establishing a residues and food waste plan as low as possible, with the aim of reaching zero levels in the future.
- Educating visitors to respect the natural environment.
- Educating visitors on the Celtiberian heritage and its preservation.
- Controlling the flow of visitors so as not to exceed the capacity limits both at the level of the community and of visitors to the archaeological site.
- Offering a tourist experience of proximity by treating the visitor as a resident.

Thanks to all these actions, Garray went from being a village on the verge of death to being the richest municipality in the province in 2021 (latest data collected at municipal level by the

Spanish National Institute of Statistics, INE for its Spanish acronym), considerably above that of Soria capital and the average for the province [29]. Therefore, our initial hypothesis that respect for triple-impact sustainability with circularity measures and through the Social Economy is always a guarantee of success has been fulfilled. Surely, this can prosper as long as the resident is regarded as the cornerstone of any type of initiative to be developed in the community; otherwise, in the medium and long term, the actions will end up failing.

5. Conclusions

Tourism is an important source of wealth for destinations, but its ultimate purpose, i.e. bringing people together, strengthening ties, and contributing to peace between peoples, should not be overlooked. Unfortunately, this objective has been too often neglected in favour of focusing on income generation.

As indicated in this paper, COVID-19 was an important and urgent wake-up call to the tourism sector so that it could decide whether they wanted to continue with the existing model or start to make a paradigm shift towards a humanisation of the model. Regrettably, the parties involved do not seem to be aware of this reality.

It is a necessity to assume the generation of economic, social and environmental sustainability in all economic activities; and tourism cannot be an exception. If we only focus on one, or two, of these vectors, we cannot speak of sustainability. It is clear that, in this sense, the Social Economy is a benchmark to be taken into account as it combines both the circular economy and the common good as well as sustainable tourism and responsible tourism. Destination communities become protagonists in the tourism development of their environment and, therefore, in the sustainability of their own community at all levels.

In this analysis, two illustrative examples have been presented, developed by our research group on social innovation and inclusive business, of how two aspects of the Social Economy can contribute to the empowerment of disadvantaged communities. Firstly, the indigenous community of Nasa Council in Cali (Colombia), where women have been empowered through training and support for the development of their own entrepreneurial initiatives in the form of cooperatives, resulting in their own contribution to the sustainability of the community and a significant increase in their self-esteem and self-worth. Secondly, support and monitoring for a small rural community in central Spain (Garray, Soria), which was in serious danger of extinction; thanks to the creation of a non-profit association, it has been able to reverse the process, generate economic wealth, contribute to environmental sustainability and the preservation of its historical heritage, and profoundly promote the social cohesion of the community. In both cases, a follow-up is being carried out to ensure that the model continues to be as successful as it has been so far. We will also begin to identify other disadvantaged indigenous communities in Latin America to offer our support in their struggle to survive in the adverse circumstances that surround them, especially in the case of women. We will also continue to assist the initiatives of young people and women who wish to implement social entrepreneurship in depopulated areas of Spain in order to alleviate this situation.

It is important to work so that urban destinations prosper and create quality of life for their citizens. However, we cannot forget that rural communities are the custodians of both the culture and traditions of villages. Without them, the roots that created the nation are lost and, therefore, it loses its attractiveness to the outside world. Consequently, a nation without its idiosyncrasy has no future.

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Rezumat

Turismul post-COVID trebuie încadrat într-o nouă paradigmă bazată pe valorile sustenabilității cu impact triplu (economic, dar și de mediu și social) și nu pe cea a veniturilor economice imediate. Circularitatea economiei și inovația socială devin axe fundamentale pe care se construiesc pilonii unui nou turism. Scopul acestei lucrări este de a demonstra că acest lucru este posibil prin intermediul economiei sociale. În acest scop, vor fi prezentate dovezi privind două inițiative la care a lucrat grupul nostru de cercetare privind inovarea socială și afacerile incluzive de-a lungul mai multor ani. În primul rând, o experiență dezvoltată cu comunitatea indigenă a Consiliului Nasa din Cali (Colombia) guvernată de un sistem matriarhal; iar în al doilea rând, încă unul într-un mic sat din centrul Spaniei, o zonă cu probleme serioase de depopulare rurală. Prin două modele ale Economiei Sociale s-a realizat o experiență de succes care a durat în timp. Prin urmare, este posibilă combinarea inovației sociale cu turismul pentru a obține durabilitatea deplină în destinații.

Cuvinte-cheie: durabilitate, economie socială, ruralitate, femei, turism responsabil

Аннотация

Туризм пост-COVID должен быть внедрён в рамках новой парадигмы, которая охватывает ценности устойчивости с тройным воздействием (экономическим, но также экологическим и социальным), а не сиюминутным экономическим доходом. Циркулярность экономики и социальные инновации становятся фундаментальными осями, на которых строятся столпы нового туризма. Цель этой статьи — продемонстрировать, что это возможно с помощью социальной экономики. С этой целью будут представлены данные о двух инициативах, над которыми наша исследовательская группа работала с вопросами социальных инноваций и инклюзивным бизнесом в течение нескольких лет. Во-первых, опыт, полученный с коренной общиной Совета НАСА в Кали (Колумбия), управляемой матриархальной системой; и, во-вторых, еще один в небольшой деревне в центральной части Испании, в районе с серьезными проблемами сокращения сельского населения. Благодаря двум моделям социальной экономики был достигнут успешный опыт, который сохраняется с течением времени. Следовательно, можно сочетать социальные инновации с туризмом для достижения полной устойчивости направлений.

Ключевые слова: устойчивость, социальная экономика, сельское хозяйство, женщины, ответственный туризм

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