

Api-tourism in Spain as a paradigm of territorial revitalization in response to depopulation and the loss of traditional trades

El Api turismo en España como paradigma de revitalización territorial frente a la despoblación y la pérdida de oficios tradicionales

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Abstract

The preservation of traditional trades in rural areas has evolved into a strategic priority that goes beyond their cultural and heritage value. It now encompasses critical dimensions such as rural population retention, habitability, forest fire prevention, and the fight against land desertification. Within this framework, Api-tourism emerges as a sustainable and regenerative tourism initiative, blending the enjoyment of rustic landscapes with a deeper understanding of rural life.

This practice is examined as a dynamic convergence between beekeeping and agrotourism, highlighting key aspects through case studies of Api-tourism operations in Spain's inland mountain regions. The findings suggest that Api-tourism plays a vital role in biodiversity conservation, community cultural preservation, and rural population stability, while also contributing to employment generation, seasonal income diversification, and the promotion of

hybrid production models aligned with the concept of New Rurality—a revitalized territorial paradigm driven by tourism.

Key words: Agrotourism; Cultural Heritage; Cultural Identity

Resumen

La necesidad de preservar los oficios tradicionales en el ámbito rural se ha convertido en un foco de interés que trasciende el valor patrimonial, para abarcar un enfoque estratégico al servicio de la retención de la población rural, la salvaguarda de la habitabilidad, los incendios forestales y la desertización de las tierras. En este contexto, el Api-turismo surge como una iniciativa turística sostenible y regenerativa, que armoniza el disfrute de los paisajes rústicos, con la comprensión profunda de la vida en el campo. Su práctica se explora como una convergencia dinámica entre la apicultura y el agroturismo analizando los aspectos más relevantes que permiten contrastar un conjunto de oportunidades a partir del estudio de casos de explotaciones api turísticas en las serranías del interior en España. Se concluye que el api-turismo desempeña un papel relevante en la conservación de la biodiversidad, la población y la cultura comunitaria, así como en la mejora del empleo rural, la diversificación de los flujos de ingresos estacionales y la estimulación de metodologías de producción híbrida que abogan por una Nueva Ruralidad resultado del factor revitalizador del turismo en el territorio.

Palabras clave: agroturismo, patrimonio cultural, identidad cultural

1 Introduction: past and present modes of production

Traditional trades, particularly those entwined with the material goods production in the agricultural sector, embody cultural attributes that serve as a mirror to societal identity, the evolutionary trajectories of populations, and the unfolding paradigms of production (Valle Perulero, 2020). It is within this evolving landscape, characterized by emerging modes of production, exemplified by tourist services and the burgeoning Green Economy, that novel prospects for employment and the sustenance of rural communities come into being. Notably, domains like organic agriculture and agritourism, among others (Rodrigues Ferreira & Sánchez Martín, 2020), are witnessing a renaissance where age-old trades serve as venerable touchstones for the meticulous and culturally enriching transformation of quality. As such, the contemporary relevance of their examination beckons attention, aligning with the scholarly pursuits of work sociology, cultural studies, and tourism studies.

Traditional trades possess the inherent capacity for transformation, being not only a significant cultural manifestation, but also an opportunity for learning and regeneration, reflecting human

adaptability to the natural environment and environmental changes. Some of these trades have endured in their essence across the centuries. Thus, these traditional trades encompass a diverse array of craftsmanship, including ceramic manipulation, vegetable fiber utilization, musical instrument crafting, blacksmithing, jewelry and costume jewelry production, woodworking, and working with materials such as marble, stone, and plaster, as well as livestock farming practices like shepherding and beekeeping, among others.

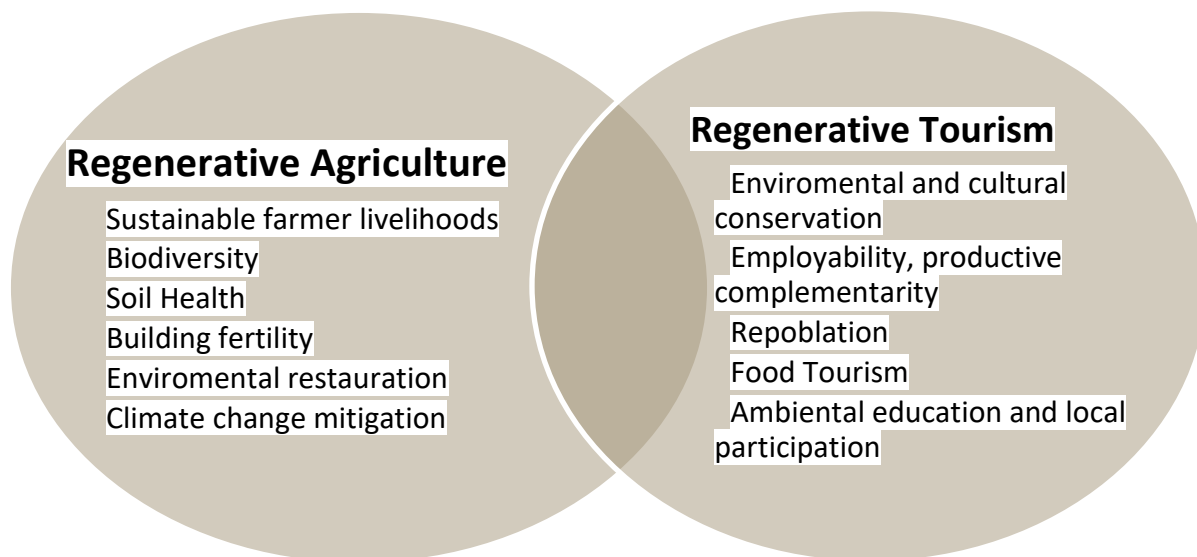
Furthermore, these vocations assume a pivotal role in the survival of rural communities, facilitating the retention of younger generations and fostering the emergence of a New Rurality (Llambi & Pérez, 2007). This phenomenon, characterized by increased vegetative growth and productive diversification, as well as novel “hybrid” configurations, substantially supplements the income streams of less prosperous sectors. Notably, in Sweden, the emergence of small craft brewing enterprises in rural areas, managed by young entrepreneurs and rooted in more cultural and experiential approaches, is a compelling illustration (Skoglund & Sjölander-Lindqvist, 2020). In the Basque Country, Spain, the Karrantza Valley's youth are actively engaged in advocating for the sustainability and conservation of distinctive livestock breeds, such as the black-headed sheep. Similarly, Australia presents additional instances where traditional rural livelihoods were historically intertwined with farming and agriculture, but evolving socio-economic policies, particularly those emphasizing rural social policies, have given rise to a complex network of interconnected initiatives, programs, and service provisions that directly impact the lives and aspirations of remote youth (Chenoweth, 2020).

Endowed with a profound dedication to socio-economic and ecological adaptation, the emerging vocations within the framework of the New Rurality, notably exemplified by ventures such as agritourism, including Api-tourism, serve as a pivotal adjunct in the amelioration of seasonal unemployment, the augmentation of earnings sourced from agrarian labor, and the mitigation of rural depopulation, which has persisted as a significant challenge for centuries, casting its shadow as the genesis of rural desertification in contemporary times. In this specific context, the intrinsic value of apicultural studies is recognized as an endeavor that not only serves to perpetuate time-honored vocations but, at its core, promotes the regenerative imperative of the environment and the drive for socio-economic enterprise. (Graphic 1). In its synergy with the tourism sector, this facet also fosters the amplification of the indigenous and transient populace in rural locales.

Beekeeping, as an age-old vocation, finds its origins in the utilization of bee-related products, including honey, wax, pollen, propolis, royal jelly, and beverages like mead, with a historical lineage spanning centuries. However, this facet represents only 10% of the advantages furnished

by these pollinators (Daberkow et al., 2009). The remaining 90% is rooted in the indispensable ecosystem service of pollination.

Graphic 1.



Source: Own elaboration

Especially at the beginning of this study the Iberian Peninsula has a notable beekeeping tradition, with Spain currently hosting 28,786 beekeepers, as per official data sourced from the Register of Agricultural and Livestock Farms (Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación [MAPA], 2021)

. This marks a 4.4% increase compared to the preceding year. Notably, Spain boasts the highest degree of specialization in this sector across the European Union, with approximately 18% of practitioners considered professional beekeepers individuals managing over 150 hives of their own.

In terms of hive count, as of April 2022, data from the European Commission positioned Spain as the leading European Union member state in this regard, with 3 097 647 hives, which represents a slight decrease of 1.4% compared to 2021. Of these, 80% belong to professional beekeepers. This was followed by Romania with 2 247 000 hives (12%) and Poland 9.3% with 1 766 000 (European Commission, 2022). Additionally, since January 2022, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Spain (MEFP) has introduced Api-tourism as a novel professional category, closely connected to strategic sectors and offering high employability within the field of Hospitality and Tourism.

There is a remarkable surge in the number of apicultural operations in Spain, as documented by the Register of Apicultural Operations (MAPA, 2021) , reflects a substantial growth trajectory within the sector (Table 1). Over the period of 2010 to 2022, there was an impressive 52%

increase, with the number of registered apicultural operations rising from 1 698 6 in July 2010 to 2 638 0 by March 2021 (Graphic 2). This robust expansion underscores the dynamic and flourishing nature of the Spanish apicultural industry in recent years, signifying its increasing significance within the national agricultural landscape.

Table 1. Evolution of the number of apicultural operations in Spain by productive capacity 2008-2024

MONTH/YEAR	NON PROFFESION	PROFFESIONAL	OTHERS	TOTAL
may-2008	1 611 9	5066	2776	2 396 1
jul-2009	1 698 6	5215	1748	2 394 9
jul-2010	1 702 7	5385	1661	2 407 3
may-2011	1 710 5	5542	1604	2 425 1
abr-2012	1 785 7	4731	1642	2 423 0
may-2013	1 8 537	4740	1589	2 486 6
may-2014	1 964 2	4879	1377	2 589 8
apr-2015	2 094 9	5046	1594	2 758 9
dic-2016	2 354 0	5443	1937	3 092 0
ene-2018	2 395 2	5337	2038	3 132 7
apr-2019	2 468 9	5781	2375	3 2845
mar-2020	2 538 2	5880	2571	3 383 3
mar-2021	2 638 0	6012	2908	3 530 0
jul-2022	2 571 2	6073	4709	3 649 4
feb-2023	25597	6120	5117	36834
Jun-2024	24889	6306	5698	36893

Source: (MAPA, 2024). Own elaboration

In the current context, in the Spanish beekeeping context, the number of registered beekeeping operations as of April 2025 stands at 36,833, representing a slight decrease of 0.2% compared to the previous year. This figure reflects a consolidation of the sector, which has experienced sustained growth of 51% since 2010. Notably, approximately 17% of these operations are considered professional, as they manage more than 150 hives—positioning Spain as the country with the highest level of professionalization in beekeeping within the European Union.

Although the exact number of individual beekeepers is not specified, it can be inferred that the figure closely aligns with the number of operations, given that many are managed by a single person or family unit. This scenario highlights the relevance of the beekeeping sector not only in terms of production, but also as a driver of rural development and environmental conservation—dimensions that directly connect with academic tourism studies, particularly regarding Api-tourism as a sustainable and educational strategy.

The emergence of new vocations within the New Rurality framework, such as agritourism and Api-tourism, is seen as a means to address seasonal unemployment, boost rural incomes, and counteract rural depopulation. Api-tourism holds the potential for both economic and environmental benefits. The Iberian Peninsula, with Spain as a notable example, has a strong beekeeping tradition, boasting a significant number of beekeepers and hives. Spain's introduction of Api-tourism as a professional category reflects the growing importance of this sector within the hospitality and tourism industry.

This research explores how Api-tourism contributes to rural revitalization in Spain by integrating traditional beekeeping into sustainable tourism practices. Specifically, it examines whether these initiatives foster local employment, preserve cultural heritage, and mitigate depopulation.

Graphic 2. Evolution of the number of apicultural operations in Spain by productive capacity 2009-2024



Source: (MAPA, 2024). Own elaboration

2 Methodology

Derived from the above, an exploratory analysis is necessary to develop and deepen the conceptual theoretical framework of the dynamics between beekeeping and agrotourism in the current reality. Therefore, this work focuses on identifying theoretical concepts that can holistically explain Api-tourism and its role in the social sustainability of rural destinations.

This conceptual analysis was also informed by fieldwork observations, through 10 case studies conducted in various areas of Spain's interior and most depopulated regions. It involved an exploratory analysis aimed at understanding the nature and scope of regenerative hospitality in

Api-tourism operations located in areas and communities experiencing population decline. The study combined the collection of quantitative sources with the use of primary qualitative data, employing techniques such as participant observation, which provided insights into the profiles and experiences of visitors and tourists, as well as in-depth interviews and life histories with owners and employees of Api-tourism enterprises across 10 provinces and 7 regions (autonomous community) in Spain (Table 2). The semi-structured interviews consisted of 10 guiding questions based on current literature on regenerative tourism (e.g., Bellato et al., 2023).

Table 2. List of cases of beekeeping tourism development.

Codes	Place	Api tourism enterprise
C1	Buenache de Alarcón. Cuenca	Proyect “Shared Beehives”
C2	Fuentes Carrionas. Palencia	“Apis in Love”
C3	La Alcarria. Guadalajara	Honey Route of Alcarria, Campillo de Ranas and Vallejos
C4	La Siberia. Extremadura	“Days of honey and roses”
C5	Liébana. Cantabria	BeeXperience
C6	Manzanera. Teruel	Las Alforjas
C7	Poyales del Hoyo. Avila	Bee Valley Museum Classroom
C8	Sierra Morena. Jaén	“Queen of Rumblar”
C9	Sierra norte de Madrid	Braojos de la Sierra
C10	Villafranca del Bierzo. León	El Parador Local

Source: Own elaboration

Thus, the cultural identity, through the preservation of the traditional trades of the tourist destination, exercised by Api-tourism and the new approaches to rurality linked to local development and the linking of the population to the rural territory are analyzed.

3 The study of trades in the rural sphere

The examination of traditional trades has gained increasing significance, as it necessitates the conceptualization of the socio-cultural attributes that emerged during the historical epochs in which they originated, along with an exploration of the interpersonal dynamics among individuals (Ayala-Ramírez et al., 2019). Furthermore, it offers insights into the societal transformations aligned with the changes experienced within the respective modes of production.

The notion of trades as professional guilds originated in the Middle Ages and the Modern Age. These guilds emerged in response to the necessity of mitigating the inherent vulnerability experienced by craftsmen within the confines of their familial urban settings. They were collectively compelled to confront and resolve a challenging economic landscape, marked by weak market demand and limited access to costly raw materials (Villas Tinoco, 2004, p. 281).

Historically, these guilds and brotherhoods in urban settings often promoted Christian ethical principles, emphasizing fair pricing and social justice above individual material interests. The rural sphere, on the other hand, was not devoid of craft trades, including blacksmiths and pottery, and similar communal associations existed among peasants. However, the economic foundations of extensive feudal estates and more individually oriented family farms did not favor the same proliferation of guilds as observed in urban areas. These guilds had been established to address the unique challenges faced by city-based trades, which differed from those encountered in rural areas, primarily due to the proximity of the food supply chain. This discrepancy became even more pronounced as market economies evolved to accommodate rural products (Epstein, 1998, 2008).

Nevertheless, the traditional guild system endured for approximately five centuries until its eventual dissolution by state authorities. Over the years, guilds made noteworthy contributions to interregional trade and technological innovation. As Epstein (1998) posits, rural industry often functioned more as a consumer rather than a generator of manufactured goods. Consequently, the historical association of guilds exclusively with urban settings does not hold, as rural manufacturing activities coexisted alongside their urban counterparts, albeit subject to more relaxed regulatory frameworks (Hernández García, 2010). In rural areas, where guild ordinances were enacted in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the defensive attributes of guilds were often less conspicuous, with a prevailing emphasis on elevating the quality of their products (Rodríguez Martín, 2018, p. 26).

The scrutiny of traditional economic activities, proto-industrial practices, and trades from a socio-economic perspective involves an in-depth investigation of these modes of production, employing classical theoretical frameworks (in classical terms of the theory undertaken by Marx). This analytical approach allows us to unravel their historical progression and, in a prospective sense, to anticipate shifts in labor dynamics, emerging transformations, forthcoming employment avenues, and pioneering niche occupations.

The conventional tenets regarding the socio-cultural constructs shaped during distinct historical epochs and deterministic social relations of production are giving way to alternative perspectives, notably influenced by the theories of Engels and, most prominently, Bernstein. According to these perspectives, capitalism no longer functions as an anarchic mode of production but possesses mechanisms for self-regulation and transformation, thereby mitigating the likelihood of systemic collapse.

Furthermore, these evolving viewpoints also take into consideration the foreseeable societal transformations and the reevaluation of traditional trades (Acerenza, 2006). In essence,

concerning traditional vocations, it has been observed that both historical and contemporary modes of production coexist. This coexistence is exemplified in instances such as beekeeping, particularly when amalgamated with the tourism industry. This entails the integration of activities with different production orientations into the market economy to varying degrees. Notably, in the context of agritourism, it signifies the fusion of agricultural and livestock activities with those associated with household management (including childcare and elderly care), education (conducted on the farm or at the apiary), and collaborative production facilitated by the alliance of ecological producers and consumers. In addition, it extends to communal living arrangements such as cohousing and coliving, as observed in ecovillages, among other manifestations.

This is particularly evident in the context of practices like Api-tourism, situated within the primary sector but integrated into the domain of (tourist) services. These endeavors may intersect with educational services, agri-food routes, rural tourism, and related areas.

In Api-tourism establishments focused on traditional beekeeping practices, they often coexist or are integrated into production units that also engage in agritourism. This particular form of tourism has seen relatively limited development in Spain compared to other European nations (Sayadi & Calatrava, 2001). Furthermore, the demand for such ventures primarily emanates from educational institutions seeking excursions and experiential training activities, rather than from family-based tourism.

This dynamic is attributed to the complexity arising from the extensive diversification of tourism offerings, a consequence of varying regulations pertaining to rural accommodation across different regions of the country. Additionally, Spain's late industrialization has resulted in many urban dwellers acquiring second homes in rural villages, thereby enhancing their familiarity with rural life. However, from the perspective of experiential leisure for families and educational institutions, familiarity with traditional trades within this context serves as a valuable educational tool, facilitating comprehension of natural and social processes. For instance, it enables the analysis of the organizational aspects of beekeeping work and bee behavior within their natural habitat.

In the Digital Age, the understanding of professions has become increasingly complex, characterized by hyper-automation, the erosion of control and expertise, and the significant de-skilling of occupations, all of which constitute fundamental aspects serving both individual and societal needs. The contemporary trend of conducting work and consumption predominantly through screens, such as in the travel industry with Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) and the use of smartphones, undeniably enhances convenience and autonomy in business planning and purchasing decisions. However, it also diminishes the social and cultural cohesion that was

inherent in traditional trades since their inception. Furthermore, the availability of self-guided learning resources like tutorials and online training further reduces interactions among professionals and levels in the playing field across various occupations.

Know-how, historically transferred through human interaction and cultural traditions specific to various trades, has now yielded ground to the omnipresence of technology and automation across all sectors. This transformation has significantly reduced opportunities for meaningful socialization and cultural experiences, leaving visitors with a growing desire for non-digitalized spaces in the realm of tourism and leisure.

4 Alternative tourism in the neo-rural movement against depopulation

An additional facet of Api-tourism pertains to its role as a complementary component within the sphere of rural tourism. This integration forms a critical element in the context of sustainable local development (Park & Yoon, 2011), and it has demonstrated its efficacy in arresting the persistent issue of depopulation in regions where this form of tourism has taken root (Matarredona Coll, 1996). As articulated by López-Palomeque and Cánves (2014), non-mass, or alternative tourism, distinguishes itself through its minimal environmental footprint, the responsible utilization and augmentation of local resources, and an unwavering commitment to preserving social, ecological, and landscape sustainability.

The approach involves a deep-seated connection with resources, often characterized as being inherited and lived within (García García, 1998). This concept aligns with the paradigm of “*New Rurality*”, which entails the reinterpretation of rural environments. It transcends the antiquated notions of scattered populations, a predominantly agrarian sector, or regions solely subservient to contributing to GDP, devoid of meaningful participation by its inhabitants. Instead, it envisions rural locales as diverse, multi-sectoral, historical and economic entities equipped to independently manage their endogenous development. This approach hinges on the appropriation of local resources and the assertion of autonomy over their productive, cultural, social, and political processes. Within this novel theoretical framework, the establishment of new businesses emerges as a potent catalyst for fostering local socio-economic advancement (Rodríguez Pose & Palavicini, 2013), particularly in the context of flourishing market niches and the burgeoning entrepreneurial endeavors among the younger population (Rubio Gil & Pascual, 2017), the challenge arises when attempting to delineate the examination of rural employability and the origins of employment opportunities and business niches. The central predicament lies in determining which geographical habitats can be classified as rural and which classification criteria should apply within rural settings. This conundrum is further compounded by the evolving conception of the ‘*New rurality*’ characterized by a remarkable diversity in habitat types and socio-economic structures.

Since its inception, tourism has been recognized as a potent instrument for alleviating poverty, as demonstrated by empirical data presented in the World Tourism Organization's 2004 report on "Tourism and Poverty Alleviation". However, notwithstanding the promising outcomes, an array of theoretical paradigms and longstanding international practices persistently highlight the negative repercussions of tourism on local socio-economic development. This impact extends to exacerbating social disparities, environmental degradation, congestion, and the depletion of resources. Consequently, the existing models and modalities of tourism have proven inadequate, necessitating a reevaluation of their effectiveness and sustainability (Tham, & Sharma, 2023).

At its inception, the concept of development was intrinsically linked with progress, entailing the transformation of underdeveloped regions into modernized counterparts, invariably favoring urban areas. This traditional perspective devalued and subordinated rural contexts to urban hegemony (Muñoz Wilches, 2000; Wanderley, 2004). In recent years, this prevailing notion of development has undergone a substantial transformation, leading certain scholars to redefine the term in the context of a novel rural conceptualization. Esteemed authors (Aparicio, et al., 1992; Llambí 1995; Graziano Da Silva, 1999; Schneider, 2006) have collectively championed a shift in focus. This metamorphosis culminated in the coining of the term "new rurality", denoting an environment in which,

"New and old policies, new and old actors, new and old forms of social relations, new social movements coexist" (Barrio, 2013, p. 123).

According to authors like Llambí and Pérez (2007), this concept epitomizes the contemporary milieu of rural transformation, a milieu that no longer serves as a receptacle for unwanted urban surpluses such as waste, polluting industries, and industrial farms, but rather has the potential to evolve into a regenerative development landscape. The concept of regenerative development, coined by Daniel Wahl in his 2006 work "Designing Regenerative Cultures", envisions the territory as a space where nature, interests, identity, and culture can converge and interlace. This conception entails the orchestration of geographic components into concrete processes aimed at achieving collective objectives (López-Santos et al., 2017).

In this context, rural tourism plays a pivotal role in sustaining local populations through diversification of economic activities, seasonal complementarity, the incorporation of indigenous practices, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Additionally, tourism serves as a multiplying factor for economic activity, provided it simultaneously assumes responsibility for the rejuvenation of the region without compromising the natural and cultural environment.

The impact of tourism on depopulation trends and the municipal structure in host regions is profound. This impact arises from the three components fueling tourism's growth: births, immigration, and a decrease in mortality rates. Demographically, this translates into a population pyramid with a reduced aging population, a concentration of individuals within working and reproductive age groups, leading to an increase in birth rates and a decrease in mortality rates. In rural areas, this shift results in a higher rate of feminization in the tourism and personal services sector, as compared to the primary sector, fostering greater gender balance and a higher birth rate.

Furthermore, the influx of travelers contributes to a significant concentration of a floating population, subject to seasonality. These individuals, on occasion, transition into permanent residents, often due to retirement, remote work, the establishment of new businesses, thereby intensifying the demand for increased quantity and efficiency in services and resources.

It has been firmly established that tourism exerts a *multiplier effect* on income and employment (Archer, 1976, 1982). This effect extends to both direct activities, encompassing accommodation, dining, transportation, and the like, as well as indirect activities such as commerce and construction. Consequently, upon the implementation of a tourist offering, the contribution to local development is inherently linked to this multiplier effect. This effect triggers a cascading chain of impacts, which includes direct, indirect, and induced consequences (emerging from the former) on the local populace. These impacts encompass areas such as demand, value creation, employment opportunities, and the generation of foreign currency, among other economic dimensions.

On a parallel note, the introduction of a tourism offering in a specific locale stimulates local populations through promotional activities, tour operators, and other tourism intermediaries, and involves the hiring of both local and foreign employees. This “*call effect*” initiates a population increase in the region.

In summary, rural tourism exhibits several highly advantageous facets for counteracting the depopulation trend. These benefits can be succinctly summarized as:

1. The multiplier effect of the tourist offering, previously discussed, has long foreshadowed prospects for development and job creation.
2. The diversification effect and the ability to attract investments, encompassing diverse types of tourism such as adventure, sports, cultural, scientific, and api-tourism, particularly in inland tourism.

3. The complementary effect on labor, both during regular working hours and seasonally, extends beyond traditional sectors like agriculture to encompass various service-related activities.
4. The generation of niche businesses and a source of new job opportunities driven by demand, augmented by the inherent complexity of automating personal services.

This aspect aligns with the considerations made by the European Council during the employment crisis that commenced in the early nineties, as reflected in Minister Delors' 1992 White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness, and Employment, as well as the objectives outlined in Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005; 5. The inductive effect emanating from the creation of employment in sub-sectors associated with tourist movements, particularly those dedicated to the preservation and conservation of natural and cultural landscapes, facilitating their harmonious integration within the territory.

The neo-rural movement has assumed a significant role in the battle against depopulation in Spain, with its beekeeping and Api-tourism initiatives aligning seamlessly with its programmatic principles. For example, the neo-rural group “Ábrego” in the province of Burgos explicitly articulates its objectives, which include:

1. Providing both theoretical and practical training in traditional knowledge and trades, equipping those interested with the skills required to establish economic projects linked to these trades and the rural environment.
2. Raising awareness about the imperative to preserve and champion a vibrant rural world, promote traditional wisdom, foster social participation in public affairs, advocate for environmental care and respect, and endorse commendable community practices. This objective aligns with the regenerative capacity of beekeeping and promotes environmental education in Api-tourism.
3. Promoting awareness about conscious, sustainable, and ecological consumption while encouraging its practical application.
4. Offering cultural enrichment to members through resources such as documentaries, a library, music, and instruments, with a particular emphasis on knowledge related to villages and rural traditions; Providing guidance and counsel, to the best of their knowledge, to individuals with an interest or ambition to initiate or join life or professional projects in rural settings.

Ecovillages and various neo-rural movement projects have played an important role in the preservation and transmission of traditional trades within the Spanish context and beyond.

Curiously, while considerable attention has been directed towards ecological horticulture, ornithology, and new knowledge domains like circular economy, spatial planning, collaborative housing, and energy cooperatives, relatively less focus has been devoted to beekeeping and Api-tourism, both of which hold distinct potential for repopulation and ecological pursuits.

Notably, previous studies on this subject, such as those by Gómez-Arnedo et al. (2022) and Alonso on the “Ábrego” group (2020), underscore the essential role of training courses and conferences in the neo-rural repopulation and ecological movement, emphasizing traditional trades like ecological horticulture and ornithology.

Additionally, Ruiz Escudero (2012) identifies a causal link between the loss of local heritage in rural areas and the erosion of traditional agricultural knowledge, a phenomenon correlated with the peak of rural exodus in Spain between 1955 and 1965. His thesis delves into agro-ecological community experiences but notably overlooks the realm of Api-tourism.

An illustrative instance of a repopulation network is the Rural Alternative Movement (MAR), characterized by various forms of association experiences, including nuclear association within families, community association featuring nuclear sub-associations, and commune association without nuclear sub-associations. More recently, a novel type of association known as “cohousing” has emerged, representing an intermediary model situated between nuclear association and commune association. Within “cohousing”, private spaces coexist with shared activities within the same dwelling. One such example is the case of Ecoaldea Arterra, located in Artieda, Navarra. Collectively, this constitutes a highly noteworthy repopulation movement that holds significance from both a qualitative and structural standpoint in terms of models and experiences, despite not necessarily yielding a high number of groups or inhabitants.

In parallel, the domain of agritourism has witnessed a significant presence, characterized by the movement of individuals to diverse locations with the intent of gaining insights into rural production processes encompassing cultivation, harvesting, animal husbandry, and various facets of rural life. This includes visits to and participation in the collection of bee-derived products. Such experiences have evolved into rural tourism within agricultural establishments, yielding substantial profits. Notably, this is attributed to the fact that a majority of the consumables provided to visitors are sourced directly from the farms themselves (Da Silva Sousa, 2006).

5 Api-tourism: traditional trades as an element of identity and a tourist attraction

Within the framework of what has been referred to as empty or depopulated Spain (Del Molino Molina, 2016), society is increasingly emphasizing the rural cultural heritage as an integral component of its identity and, in many instances, as a vehicle capable of ensuring the sustainability

of rural regions through tourism and secondary residences. This emphasis seeks to counter the pervasive depopulation trend. The movement places significant importance on the preservation and promotion of festivals, rituals, traditions, and traditional crafts, all of which represent,

"One of the most fragile areas of Intangible Cultural Heritage (...). It is about the knowledge of the people that one day began to be relegated to the detriment of the new procedures" (Valle Perulero, 2020, p. 11).

This heritage embodies the collective knowledge that, over time, started to wane in favor of novel procedures brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

To grasp this phenomenon, it is imperative to first acknowledge the significant shifts that have unfolded in recent years, marking a departure from longstanding paradigms associated with the process of patrimonialization. One such paradigm is the unifying paradigm, notably detrimental to the preservation of traditional musical folklore during the previous century. It is characteristic of authoritarian regimes and often runs counter to the original intent of heritage conservation, specifically the respect for autochthonous meanings. Another prevalent paradigm is substantialist traditionalism (García Canclini, 1999), which emphasizes the intrinsic value of objects for their historical significance and symbolic representation. This perspective tends to render objects inert, relegating them to museum-like status, thereby diminishing their social relevance.

On the contrary, in recent decades, there has been a process of cultural heritage preservation that not only promotes their safeguarding but also deepens their historical significance. This phenomenon mirrors, albeit in a more responsible manner, the intensity of the late 19th century when rural ways of life were highly regarded by romantic writers as assets to be protected against modernization. Traditional trades, characterized by their peculiarity and autochthonous nature, have evolved into cultural assets subject to ethnological study and learning. Their romantic and literary qualities have turned them into a matter of significant tourist attraction, creating a considerable and steadily growing demand. According to various studies, this constitutes the primary motivation for tourists, with 32.2% of alternative (non-mass) tourism trips seeking tourist attractions as their main motivation (Mayra & Aldapa, 2007). The proximity of the destination, accounting for 16% of tourists, is another characteristic interest, particularly noticeable in beekeepers exploring honey routes and beekeeping centers across the Iberian Peninsula today.

Tourism serves as an exceptional means of cultural transmission and dissemination, enhancing the value of local arts and customs while underscoring their distinctiveness and identity. It is particularly significant in destinations where diverse cultures converge, as the identity of the destination itself becomes a central attraction for many travelers, whether through identification,

genealogical tourism, or the differentiation that highlights the value of local art, crafts, and traditional trades. Both processes, the identification of the public and differentiation from the competition, represent fundamental mechanisms of advanced marketing.

The cases of Api-tourism project analysis reveal the integration of accommodation, hive tours, and educational workshops within Api-tourism projects reflects a strategic diversification of services aimed at enhancing the sector's tourist appeal. According to the data, 70% of the initiatives offer hive tours, indicating a strong emphasis on immersive, nature-based experiences. Educational workshops are present in 60% of the projects, underscoring the role of Api-tourism in transmitting traditional knowledge and promoting environmental awareness. Meanwhile, 60% provide accommodation, facilitating longer stays and deeper engagement with rural settings. This combination of experiential, educational, and hospitality services positions Api-tourism as a compelling form of heritage tourism, capable of attracting visitors interested in sustainability, local culture, and agroecological practices. By offering multifaceted experiences, these projects contribute not only to rural development and income diversification but also to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage and the promotion of responsible tourism.

In the context of the new rurality, the revival of ancient economic activities offers an opportunity for heritage preservation within the requisite eco-vision, crucial for the sustainability of rural villages and consequently the attraction of visitors in this new century. A notable example is the transition from ethnological museums to eco-museums, a concept introduced by the French museologist Hugues de Varine-Bohan (1971), which designates exhibition centers oriented towards the identity of a territory. These centers are based on community participation for sustainable development. For instance, the Eco- Museum of Honey in Ejea de los Caballeros, Zaragoza. Within eco-museums, traditional trades such as organic farming and beekeeping represent a path towards regenerative tourism, contributing to the preservation of destinations and facilitating a mutually beneficial interaction between the tourist supply and demand.

In this sense, traditional crafts as an indigenous cultural manifestation of specific historical moments or those deferred in time, are once again of interest as a community, tourist, and documentary cultural experience. Thus, within folklore, the representation of traditional crafts has been part of the community ritual. These are manifestations that can still be found in the Spanish Castilian-Leonese dances of our days of great tourist interest, if not in folklore compilations such as those of Agapito Marazuela (1981), who has a good repertoire of traditional songs and dances of trades (going to the harvest, shepherding, grape harvest, grazing, threshing and sifting, etc) the latter three in relation to the industries derived from forestry exploitation.

The Galician dances, for their part, recreate around the moon the Celtic belief that the souls present in the waters go up to the sky "and through one of the vines of the rainbow to the moon, from where they come, later on, (Rosemary is a funerary plant because bees constantly drink from it, which are bees that come from the moon, that is why "whoever kills a bee has a hundred years of sorrow", that is also why

"Dancing and aturuxar looking at the moon were simply an acknowledgement and a memory of the ancestors" (Antón and Mandianes, 1998, p. 250-257).

In Pyrenean Navarre, the world of bees is also linked to that of the souls, so it can be assumed that beekeeping has a mystical aspect,

"when one of the masters of the house died, the news was communicated to the domestic animals and to the bees in a very special way so that they would make the wax with which to light the church (their place, just as the house was the place of the living)" "Erlechak erlechak, eguizute arguizaria: angusi il da, ta bear da elizan arguia", as the Navarrese song says (Caro Baroja, 1971, p. 326).

Delving into Api-tourism (from the Latin Apis - bee) as an object of study and a new trade centred on one of the oldest, it has been vaguely defined in the academic literature, highlighting the definition of Wos (2014) which considers a model of tourism that connects the traditional art of beekeeping and products of the hive (ecological, gastronomic and medicinal) with the visitor: a participatory activity that involves visiting an apiary, dressing up in protective clothing and learning the legendary craft from the hand of a beekeeper. Porter (2020) defines it as any trip, whether regional, national or international, with the mere intention of interacting with bees and the culture that surrounds them. In addition to witnessing the work, the visitor tastes different types of honey, broadens their knowledge about the products of the hive and the importance of these insects, and learns about apitherapy (Spevak, 2012; Wos, 2014; Izquierdo Gascón & Rubio Gil, 2022). Api-tourism is a sustainable form of travel that integrates beekeeping and offers educational experiences, including talks, workshops, and immersive activities such as becoming a beekeeper for a day and exploring flora and honey routes (Figure 1). This concept supports local crafts, culinary traditions, and encourages local tourism. Additionally, cultural tourist routes have become a key driver of endogenous development supported by the European Union. Api-tourism, coupled with beekeeping, plays an important role in preserving traditional industries and their environmental impact, notably in combating desertification and biodiversity loss (Horn, 2005; Shiffler, 2014; Wos, 2014; Kline Arih, & Arih Korošec, 2015; Šuligoj, 2021; Gonzalez-Arnedo et al., 2022).

Figure 1. Api-tourism activity in Guadalajara, Spain



Source: Own elaboration (2023)

However, it is essential to consider the negative impacts of resource-intensive tourism and over-tourism in rural areas with limited urbanization and high ecological value. Therefore, understanding the role of tourism in traditional industries like beekeeping is crucial for sustainable development from social, economic, and ecological perspectives. Api-tourism and beekeeping offer a three-fold benefit encompassing population, culture, and environmental sustainability, presenting a new paradigm of tourism for development that emphasizes the protection and enhancement of the environment (Kline Arih, & Arih Korošec, 2015; Aryal et al., 2020).

6 Api-tourism Offer: Industrial beekeeping archaeology and Gastronomic Tourism

The cultural importance of honey since ancient times would have justified Virgil (Virgil, 70 BC - Brundisium, 19 BC) dedicating book 4 of *Georgics* to beekeeping, providing much practical advice, particularly on the craft of handling bees and extracting honey. He also gave political advice, suggesting that the Roman state should be inspired by the complex social organization of the hives. At this time, in rural areas and on the outskirts of cities and secondary settlements there were hives (*mellaria*) under the responsibility of beekeepers or mellarius, who had apiarius in their service, i.e., slaves specialized in the collection and processing of honey (Morillo et al., 2019).

Despite the attention they receive in classical texts, it is not easy to trace archaeological traces of these activities due to their exposure to the inclement weather of apiaries and beehives, sometimes having to resort to onomastic and epigraphic studies, as well as others of an ethnographic nature such as those mentioned in musical folklore, to try to reconstruct beekeeping from antiquity, as part of the archaeology of production, and in more recent times to industrial

archaeology. The term industrial archaeology, which arose in 1955 as a result of an article published by Michael Rix of the University of Birmingham in England, goes hand in hand with the concept of industrial heritage. It is for this reason that rural production sites from the past are also considered as such in many countries, and specifically in the Basque-Navarre area, the Casa Otegui Beekeeping Museum in Murgia (Araba). As well as their tools, in the Museum of Agricultural Machinery in Ajuria (Araba) or the old beehives or apiary tools in the Aikur Museum in Urretxu (Gipuzkoa). Of the transformation of the products of the land of Navarre, such as the Mejana mill and the deposits of the trujales in the Plaza de San Miguel (oil mills) in Tudela or the Ezkurdi Honey Museum, with training on its production in apiaries in the Ultzama Valley. According to Roffet-Salque et al. (2015), samples of beeswax have been found in the remains of ceramic craft objects in various Neolithic settlements in Europe, dating back as far as 7000 BC. Also noteworthy are the cave paintings found in the Cueva de la Araña in Bicorp, Valencia, which show what appears to be a female figure collecting honey from a beehive and which is estimated to date from the Mesolithic (10 000 BC - 5000 BC), a period in which, according to several authors (Sepulveda-Gil, 1986; Kritsky, 2017), beekeeping emerged.

The cultural significance of honey dates back to ancient times and is evident in the fact that Virgil (70 BC - 19 BC) dedicated an entire book (Book 4) of his *Georgics* to beekeeping. In this work, he provided practical advice on handling bees and extracting honey. Virgil also drew political parallels, suggesting that the Roman state could learn from the complex social organization of beehives. During this period, rural areas and the outskirts of cities and secondary settlements had hives known as "mellaria," managed by beekeepers or "mellarius," who had specialized slaves called "apiarius" responsible for collecting and processing honey (Morillo et al., 2019).

While classical texts highlight the importance of beekeeping, archaeological evidence of these activities is challenging to find due to the exposure of apiaries and beehives to the elements. Researchers often rely on onomastic and epigraphic studies and ethnographic sources, such as those related to musical folklore, to reconstruct the history of beekeeping. This approach contributes to the field of archaeology focused on production, including industrial archaeology.

The term "industrial archaeology" emerged in 1955 through an article by Michael Rix from the University of Birmingham in England. It is closely associated with the concept of industrial heritage. As a result, historical sites related to rural production are also considered part of industrial heritage in various countries. For instance, in the Basque-Navarre region, you can find examples of beekeeping heritage at the Casa Otegui Beekeeping Museum in Murgia, Araba, where tools and equipment are displayed. The Museum of Agricultural Machinery in Ajuria, Araba, features antique beehives and apiary tools. Similarly, the Aikur Museum in Urretxu, Gipuzkoa, showcases old

beehives and related artifacts. In the Navarre region, sites like the Mejana mill, the oil mills in the Plaza de San Miguel in Tudela, and the Ezkurdi Honey Museum provide insights into the transformation of agricultural products. The Ezkurdi Honey Museum also offers training on honey production within apiaries in the Ultzama Valley.

Furthermore, according to Roffet-Salque et al. (2015), beeswax samples have been discovered in the remains of ceramic craft objects at various Neolithic settlements in Europe, with some dating back as early as 7000 BC. Additionally, cave paintings in the Cueva de la Araña in Bicorp, Valencia, depict a female figure collecting honey from a beehive and are estimated to date from the Mesolithic period (1 000 0 BC - 5000 BC). This era is considered to mark the emergence of beekeeping (Sepulveda-Gil, 1986; Kritsky, 2017).

During the Full and Final Iberian period (III B.C. - I A.D.), ceramic beehives were used in various regions of Valencia, specifically in 78 documented sites within the Valencian regions of Camp de Túria, Los Serranos, Alto Palància, and Plana de Utiel. These ancient ceramic beehives represent an important part of the material heritage of traditional beekeeping. These hives, along with the immaterial heritage, such as literature related to the traditional beekeeping trade, tools, and working equipment, hold cultural and historical significance. These assets contribute to a unique tourist attraction and fall under the purview of Industrial Archaeology, which explores the methods, machinery, and social aspects related to various industrial processes.

Historically, both Greeks and Romans practiced beekeeping transhumance, a method that continues to this day. This practice involved periodically moving beehives to follow the blooming of different honey-producing plants. The hives were crafted from rudimentary materials, including vegetable matter and animal skins, and were placed in bee-friendly locations such as trees or cavities. Similar practices are still observed in various parts of the world. For instance, the Mursi people in Ethiopia and, until recently, in the vicinity of the Aragonese Pyrenees, used light basketry hives, known as "arnales rupestres" or "banqueras."

Beekeeping archaeology seeks to provide a comprehensive view of beekeeping practices, including the production of honey, wax, and related products, hive construction, and the individuals involved in this trade. The geographical scope of this study extends across the Mediterranean, Central Europe, and the Atlantic facade. One of the valuable products associated with beehives is mead, a unique beverage from ancient times known for its nutritional significance, ritual uses, and importance in the world of the deceased. Archaeological research and iconography can help us understand how mead and related beverages played a role in social cohesion and symbolism within different cultures. Mead held significance in funerary contexts, and some cultures regarded it as an elixir of strength in the underworld. Experimental archaeology

enables the reconstruction of the processes involved in the production of these historical substances, knowledge that has been largely lost over time and during the industrial revolution.

Clay hives have been used since at least the 3rd millennium BC, providing a historical context for beekeeping. They were designed to be placed horizontally for better accessibility to the bees. References to clay hives are found in works by Roman agricultural authors such as Varron and Columella.

Traditional trades, including beekeeping, are not only vital for preserving intangible heritage and specialized skills but also play a crucial role in rural revival, making remote areas more accessible. These trades often involve close interaction with nature and are at risk of disappearing along with their ancestral knowledge and techniques. Beekeeping projects offer opportunities for diversifying income with low startup costs, providing products and services like honey, pollen, wax, propolis, royal jelly, and pollination services. Themed restaurants or those offering culinary specialties derived from honey and the natural environment (Table 3). Furthermore, vocational education in beekeeping promotes employment opportunities and entrepreneurship, contributing to gender equality (Patel et al., 2021).

Table 3. List of cases of beekeeping tourism development.

Codes	Project and place	Restaurant	Product Sales	Museum
C1	Shared Beehives, Buenache (Cuenca)	Yes	Yes	Yes
C2	Apis in Love, Fuentes Carrionas (Palencia)	No	Yes	No
C3	Honey Route of Alcarria, Campillo de Ranas and Vallejos (Guadalajara)	Yes	Yes	Yes
C4	Days of Honey and Roses, Siberia (Extremadura)	Yes	Yes	Yes
C5	BeeXperience, Liébana (Cantabria)	No	Yes	Yes
C6	Las Alforjas, Manzanera (Teruel)	Yes	No	No
C7	Bee Valley Museum Classroom, Poyales del Hoyo (Ávila)	No	Yes	Yes
C8	Queen of Rumbler (Jaén)	No	Yes	No
C9	Braojos de la Sierra, Madrid	Yes	No	No
C10	El Parador Local, Villafranca del Bierzo, León	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Own elaboration

Based on the analysis of ten Api-tourism initiatives, the integration of complementary services reveals a strategic approach to enhancing visitor engagement and economic sustainability. Specifically, 80% of the projects offer local product sales, while 60% include gastronomic services

and 60% feature museum or exhibition spaces. These figures suggest a strong emphasis on the commercialization of honey and related products, reflecting the sector's potential for value-added rural entrepreneurship. The presence of themed restaurants and interpretive spaces further indicates a growing trend toward experiential tourism, where cultural heritage and natural resources are leveraged to create immersive and educational experiences. This multidimensional model not only diversifies income streams but also contributes to the preservation of intangible heritage and promotes regional identity through culinary and museographic narratives.

The results of the Api-tourism projects analysis reveal a promising intersection between heritage tourism and gastronomic experiences as viable sources of rural income. The analysis revealed three main patterns: (1) the integration of gastronomy and product sales increases visitor engagement and economic sustainability; (2) educational components such as museums and workshops strengthen the transmission of traditional knowledge; and (3) the combination of experiential and interpretive services diversifies rural income sources. Several initiatives combine educational components, such as museums, with product sales and themed culinary services, offering a multifaceted visitor experience. This integration not only preserves traditional beekeeping knowledge and practices but also enhances local economies by attracting diverse tourist profiles. Projects like "Shared Beehives" and "El Parador Local" exemplify how Api-tourism can leverage cultural heritage and natural resources to create sustainable tourism models. By promoting honey-based gastronomy and immersive learning environments, these ventures contribute to rural revitalization, entrepreneurship, and the valorisation of intangible heritage, aligning with broader goals of sustainable development and cultural preservation.

7 Results and conclusions

Traditional trades in rural areas offer a promising avenue for local development, contributing to a more sustainable way of life from ecological, socio-economic, and cultural perspectives. In this context, alternative tourism, specifically agritourism, plays a pivotal role as it serves as a multiplier for employment, income generation, and the preservation of intangible heritage. This symbiotic relationship between traditional trades and tourism fosters the dissemination of knowledge and practices from one generation to the next. It also enhances awareness of rural life among younger generations, often complemented by other tourist attractions like folklore. In the case of beekeeping and Api-tourism, these activities have proven to be highly engaging for families and children, creating connections between consumers and the products of beekeeping, such as honey, wax, royal jelly, or liqueurs. Additionally, beyond preserving beekeeping as a cultural heritage and tourist attraction, Api-tourism delivers vital ecosystem services through bee

pollination, benefiting agriculture, reforestation, and thus rural incomes, contributing to the regenerative development of rural culture and the environment.

Beekeeping stands as a dynamic, unfeigned, and cost-effective means of safeguarding traditional trades, production practices, and regenerative culinary traditions in rural settings. It satisfies the human need for authentic and unmediated environments that stand apart from the effects of globalization and digitalization, which often homogenize culture, leisure, and life. Beekeeping exists outside the realm of “the logic of simulation”, as discussed by cultural sociologist Jean Baudrillard (1978), emphasizing the authenticity of experiences and placing real-life occurrences above simulated ones.

Sitting at the intersection of the traditional trade of beekeeping and tourism, it plays a substantial role in the New Rurality. This hybrid approach leads to specialized travel, lodging, and dining offerings along with training programs focused on preserving traditional trades (including beekeepers, honey production, traditional pastries, culinary workshops, wax craftsmanship, mead, natural beauty products, etc.). This dynamic points toward innovative forms of tourism that align with the New Rurality's quest for authenticity and sustainability. By retaining the rural population, fostering popular culture, and preserving regional identity, these approaches offer fresh and more sustainable entrepreneurial prospects for rural areas.

The findings confirm that Api-tourism fosters rural revitalization through three mechanisms: knowledge transmission, diversification of income, and increased local identity. However, its impact remains uneven across territories, largely depending on institutional support and training. Future research should evaluate its long-term economic sustainability.

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