

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

# A GEOGRAPHICAL AND LEGAL STUDY OF AGRITOURISM IN SPAIN: A SUPPLY-SIDE PERSPECTIVE

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Agritourism has been the focus of discussion of numerous academic articles (Roberts & Hall, 2001; Sayadi & Calatrava, 2001; Mamdy, Disez & Begon, 2001; Sharpley & Vass, 2006; Phillip, Hunter & Blackstock, 2010; Barbieri, Xu, Gil-Arroyo & Rich, 2015; Durrande-Moreau, Courvoisier & Bocquet, 2017). Often, it has been considered to be synonymous with rural tourism but, in reality, agritourism is best considered as a specific subgroup of rural tourism. Organizations with links to farming and tourist sectors have sought to identify those elements that are specific to agritourism, but the diverging perspectives afforded by farmers and those working in tourism have hampered any attempt to propose an all-encompassing definition of agritourism. Ultimately, the identification of agritourism with a certain type of rural tourism is the most common and widely accepted (OECD, 1994; Disez, 1996; Cors, 2004; Pulido, 2008): in short, agritourism comprises the tourist activities offered by farmers (Di Domenico & Miller, 2012; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). However, there are other activities related to agritourism that have not been considered as such as they are not associated with rural tourism. We refer, for example, to all those activities of the agri-food sector that are usually described employing other terms or different labels, including gastronomic tourism, olive oil tourism or wine tourism.

This discussion seeks to explore the current state of agritourism in Spain by taking a supply-side perspective. The study undertakes a literature review of agritourism, conducted, initially, from a strictly theoretical point of view, before turning to focus more specifically on its regulation and development in Spain. First, we examine the presence of agritourism within the legal framework of Spain's regions or Autonomous Communities (CCAA in its Spanish acronym) and the provisions made for it – based on a review of the specific laws and decrees that regulate the sector – and, second, we analyse the distribution of agritourism farms and their specific characteristics by drawing on the official data contained in the last agrarian census conducted in 2009.

In southern Europe, agritourism has evolved over the last three decades from offering fairly basic accommodation to the development of more professionalized and diversified structures aimed at attracting an increasingly more demanding and heterogeneous customer. There has been an increase in the number of farmers offering activities related to

farm work, the production and sale of farm products and other leisure activities. In some instances, farmers have opted to increase the capacity of their accommodation facilities so as to increase the overall economic dimension of the tourist side of their business. Despite this general trend, agritourism cannot yet be said to have reached a stage of maturity in the Mediterranean countries and there are marked contrasts between regions in terms of their supply volume. For example, in some peripheral rural regions, agritourism remains scarce and poorly diversified. In the case of Spain, this limited, somewhat narrow, vision of agritourism has not helped in its development. Indeed, Sayadi and Calatrava (2001) highlighted the low level of development of agritourism, compared to other European countries, with just 0.5% of farms supplying any kind of activity.

From a legal perspective, Spain's CCAA play a very important role in the field of tourism insofar as they assume legislative powers in relation to its promotion and management. Agritourism is no different in this regard and its introduction and development are conditioned by the prevailing legal framework in each of the 17 CCAA. The regulation of agritourism dates back to the 1980s when the CCAA of the Basque Country and Catalonia first opted to regulate the activity by decree, defining it as that category of rural tourism accommodation found on farms. Since then the presence of agritourism in the regional legal framework and the provisions made for it have been uneven and disparate. Of the 17 CCAA only eight actually consider and define it in their respective regulatory frameworks.

The practice of agritourism in Spain tends to be somewhat limited, being associated primarily with tourist accommodation provided on farms. In seven of the eight Spanish CCAA that legislate on agritourism (that is, the Basque Country, Balearic Islands, Galicia, Asturias, Catalonia, Castile-La Mancha and Andalusia), it is interpreted and defined as a typology or specific modality of accommodation for rural tourism. Only in the Chartered Community of Navarre is agritourism linked to the agri-food sector and is it differentiated from the rest of the rural tourism sector. However, this almost exclusive focus of agritourism on the farm stay is slowly being overcome by the rise of a new tourism supply based on the exploitation and production of agri-foods, which includes farm visits, tastings and the sale of farm products.

According to the latest agrarian census conducted in Spain, in 2009 there was a total of 3,620 agritourism farms in operation, that is, 0.37% of the country's farms. Among the farms that carried out other types of activity, agritourism was present in just 17.4% of them. This proportion however reached 54.1% in the Balearic Islands, and rose above 40% in the coastal provinces of Cantabria and the Mediterranean. As such, it is evident that in certain coastal tourist areas – the Balearics, Costa Brava, and Costa del Sol – and also in the mountains – the Pyrenees and the Cantabrian Range – these inland farms exploit their location to diversify their activities into tourism. In contrast, in the heart of the Peninsula, the presence of agritourism was notably lower and, for many farmers of the Meseta, tourism was not among their priorities as they sought to diversify their economies. In short, the territories with the highest levels of agritourism in terms of supply volume were the Basque Country, Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and Andalusia.

According to the geographical distribution of agritourism in Spain, a number of rural areas can be identified in which the implementation of agritourism is greatest. First, as we have seen, agritourism concentrates in those highly touristic rural areas located inland

along the Mediterranean coast and in the Pyrenees. These are territories subject to strong processes of ‘touristification’ in which agritourism linked to the provision of rural accommodation has experienced remarkable growth. In these territories, agritourism is closely related to the profitable strategy of exploiting real estate by renting out rooms and/or rural homes for tourism. Second, agritourism is more prevalent in the rural areas of “wet” Spain – most notably, the Basque Country – with its dispersed rural settlements located not too far from its big cities. In these areas, agritourism enjoys an optimal framework for development with small farms opting for diversification in order to survive and agritourism is an activity that fits well with their productive orientation and size. In this instance, the two activities, tourism and farming, are *a priori* more closely interrelated. Third, we find a large rural area located in the southwest of the Peninsula, characterised by the presence of the great estates of the *latifundia* – this is the case of Ciudad Real, Extremadura and Andalusia. In this area of southern Spain, agritourism farms have experienced something of an upturn, linked, in this instance, to recreational hunting tourism and hunting in general, a deeply rooted activity in these territories.

To conclude, Spain’s potential for agritourism is great, both because of the geographical characteristics of its territory – the presence of farmers, farming activities and rural areas in large zones of the country – and because of the existence of a potential demand, or captive market, interested in the consumption of agritourism products. However, this study has found only modest results to date in terms of the presence and diversity of agritourism activities. The factors responsible for this situation are, among others:

- a) The relative lack of maturity of the agritourism phenomenon compared to the experience recorded by other European countries.
- b) The low level of participation of farmers in the tourist sector, which can be attributed to the nature and dynamics of the industry that are often difficult to reconcile with farming, above all the expense of converting old rural buildings into modern comfortable tourist accommodation and the rural environment itself with its low rates of tourist development and general lack of business dynamics.
- c) The current legislative framework governing agritourism, non-existent in some cases, disparate in others and, in general, quite restrictive in terms of the activities that might be developed. The development of new agritourism products related to agri-foods and other leisure activities should lead to a relaxation or rethinking of the current regulatory framework.