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"Women, rural environment and entrepreneurship"

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Abstract

The work raises the question about the employability of women to achieve an output to situations of violence and social exclusion generally do not consider any of the characteristics of rural areas. At least we can talk about three social problems that must be addressed from a gender perspective: rural exodus and consequently, depopulation, masculinization and aging.

Law 45 /2007 for the Sustainable Development of Rural tried to recognize the importance of rural development in the country and address the lack of economic opportunities that have favored the depopulation and marginality. However, except in regard to equal treatment between men and women, did not provide specific mechanisms for women.

The proposed work is to analyze the socio-economic situation of women in rural municipalities in Spanish now and, from initial diagnosis, try to make proposals for improving employability and economic conditions of women through entrepreneurship in certain activities and sectors.

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1. Introduction

The social exclusion of women in the rural areas is not a current phenomenon. Rural areas suffer from specific problems that must be taken into account in order to understand the real dimension of the phenomenon: the depopulation due to rural exodus during the second half of the last century has led to a large dispersion of the population, which has hampered access to basic services; the population ageing creates new social needs which are ignored due to the lack of social services and economic and human resources; a clear masculinization of the rural

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environment, up until the age of 65 the proportion of men exceeds that of women by approximately 7 percentage points (around 53.5% are men compared to 46.5% women) and the difference is particularly significant in the age range of 40 to 59. This phenomenon has been decisively influenced by the primary sector’s loss of economic weight, which has forced a displacement of women to urban areas in the hope of a better labor market integration . Other issues that make social exclusion clearly visible are the lack of infrastructure and equipment and the insufficient or non-existent social services. Women’s position in the labor market is closely related to the aspects mentioned above since they are mostly destined to household tasks, education or transport, but it is also linked with the lack of or disappearance of labor integration agencies enabled for organizing training and job placement workshops -Millán. (2002)-.

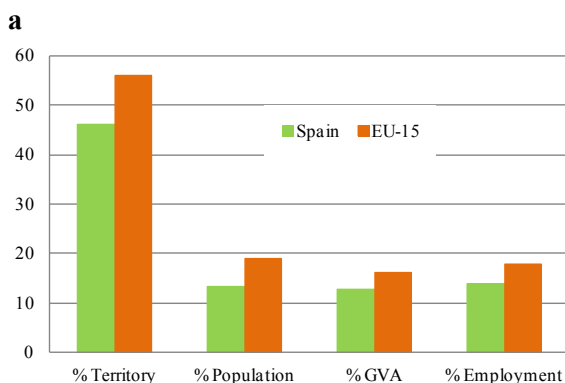
Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment Law 45/2007 sought to recognize the importance that the rural environment plays in the country’s development and make up for the lack of economic opportunities that have favored depopulation and marginality. However, except for the points referring to the equal treatment between men and women, it did not establish any specific mechanisms for women.

This paper attempts to explain the socio-economic situation of women in the Spanish rural municipalities and based on the initial analysis, aims at making proposals for employability and improvement of women’s economic conditions, encouraging entrepreneurial orientation in certain sectors and activities.

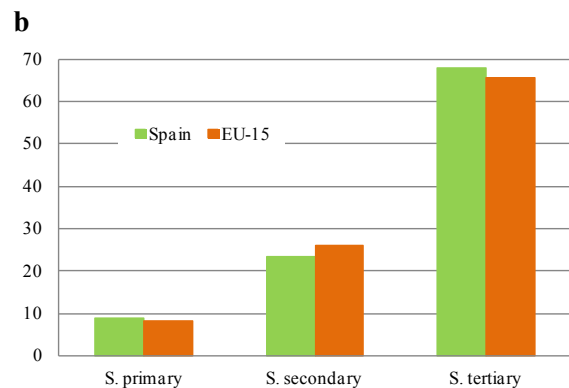
2. Quantifying the size of the rural environment

The socio-economic analysis of the life in the rural environment presents two major problems: the limited availability of data, only recent statistics are available from the division of Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission, and the actual definition of rural environment that has different meanings depending on the agency that defines it – Brezzi, Dijkstra and Ruiz (2011)-. In our case we will take into account the classification established by the European Union and the Sustainable Development of Rural Areas Law 45/2007, where the following definitions are set up in article 3:

- Rural Areas: the geographical space formed by aggregating municipalities or minor local entities defined by the competent authorities, with a population inferior to 30,000 inhabitants and a density of less than 100 inhabitants per km2.
- Rural Area: area of applicability of measures derived from the Program of Sustainable Rural Development regulated by this law, with a regional or sub-provincial range, delimited and qualified by the competent autonomous region.
- Small size rural municipality: with a resident population of less than 5,000 inhabitants and integrated in the rural environment.



Source: European Commission



Source: European Commission

Fig. 1. (a) Size of the rural areas 2010 (b) Occupational structure in rural areas 2010.

Based on data from the European Commission (see graphs a and b), Spanish rural areas' size is lower than the Eurozone's average in terms of territory - a 46% of the total-, population, gross value added (GVA) and employment all of which make for about 13% of the country's total. On the other hand, the occupational structure in Spanish rural areas is slightly above the Eurozone's average - 8.8% of total employment compared to 8.3% - for the primary sector and, following the same trend as the intermediate and urban regions, in Spain the size of the industry is inferior (almost 3 percentage points, from 23.3% of rural employment in Spain to 26.1% in the Eurozone) whereas the service sector's size is higher - 68% in Spanish rural areas compared to 65.6% in the Eurozone.

There are many other indicators the European Commission data takes into account for which we could show other types of analysis, however it does not offer the data separately for men and for women. This is why we may have the impression that, in general terms, rural areas in Spain are smaller than the Eurozone's average in terms of population, employment and productive capacity, which gives us an idea of the greater depopulation and abandonment of the rural areas in Spain.

3. Spanish women's status in rural areas

Women represent around 49% of the rural population and they act as an integrator of rural society within the territory. There are three papers that have analyzed their recent socio-economic situation: Camarero et al. (2009), two works from the Ministry of Environment, Rural and Marine (MERM) in 2011 and another paper from MAGRAMA in 2013. After grouping the main approaches we outline the following social and economic characteristics of women in Spain:

3.1. Demographic imbalance in Spain

According to Camarero et al. (2009) demographic imbalance is "threatening the sustainability of the rural world and will entail the extinction of many small villages". Only 38% of people aged between 30 and 49 in rural areas lived in 2008 in the same village where they were born, whereas in 2001 the percentage was 44.5%.

3.2. Cohabitation and marital status

A first empirical evidence regarding the socio-demographic situation shows the existence of a greater rate of married women compared to men and logically a lower bachelorhood or divorce rate; there is a significant gender gap here of more than 18 percentage points. The freedom of choice is conditioned by the civil society's tradition, which restrains reversal of the roles traditionally assigned to women in rural areas, since marriage and lack of cooperation from men in family projects are partly causing the women's labor and empowerment issues. In addition, as the age of the surveyed group increases the number of marriages rises along with it. However, the gender gap is most evident within the younger population, around 20 percentage points, with more than 60% of men aged between 20 and 34 being single compared to little more than 40% of women.

As for the household composition the study shows the highest percentage of women belong to households of four members, which is the dominant group in rural areas (more than twenty-eight percent as the study reveals). The additional burden related to the housework duties that women must take on in this type of households should necessarily be highlighted here. Another interesting point is the masculinization of bachelorhood, since the one member together with four members households are the ones displaying the highest gender gap.

3.3. Care and attention to family members and/or people with special needs.

Camarero et al. (2009) develop on the causes of the rural female population reduction identifying a first set of

factors that have resulted in the intensification of the sons and daughters' caregiving tasks; in particular the absence of childcare services, public transport, basic sanitary services, or educational facilities has led women (especially young ones) to take charge of the transport for food shopping, going to the doctor's or for education. Another factor the study considers is related to caretaking for people in a dependency situation, the female inactivity rate rises when women are in charge of people with special needs in the household. A combination of these factors condemn an important part of the female population to accept the traditionally female borne roles and help to explain the abandonment of rural households by women who are most qualified.

The quantitative analysis performed by MAFF pointed out that ten percent of women have lived with someone in a dependency situation compared to eight percent of men. It is nonetheless obvious that the task of providing direct caregiving to these people clearly falls on women. The total number of persons in a situation of dependence has been attended by a woman in 84.7% of the cases. The low birth rate hinders the generation change and there is no glimpse of a cultural change in the traditional role assumed by women in the household. This has a significant impact on the caregivers' workload, generally women, thereby weakening their options in terms of labor, political or social participation.

3.4. Labor Situation

The MAFF study addresses this issue by pointing out that the women's position in the rural labor market is characterized by a low rate of employment, with a strong gender gap, a tendency to work for hire and prevalence of tertiary sector's activities. More than a third of the rural female population is inactive and 51% of the active ones are unemployed. The gender labor gap is decreasing as the respondents' age rises which imply that, the elder they get the fewer employment opportunities they have. In addition nearly 30% of the female respondents are unpaid domestic workers, which confirms the expulsion of many women from the labor market by taking over the housework tasks, childcare or caring for people with special needs.

There is also greater job insecurity since women are hired more than the men on a permanent seasonal contract basis - a typical working contract in fieldwork and tourism - whereas men account for most of the remaining types of contracts. What also stands out is the low participation in employment as self-employed women, less than a fourth of the total on this type of contract, as well as the permanent contract, approximately 36%. The rate of women without any type of contract is above 40%, a highly significant one. An interesting fact is that part of the women who did not have a paid job and were engaged in domestic work also worked in other non-paid fields within the family unit (hospitality, tourism, etc.). These job characteristics are fully in line with the social status that women assume within the family, mainly as caregivers and practically never as main breadwinners. The seasonal contract is a distinguishing feature for younger women, with an incidence of 22.5% (in this case there is little difference with respect to men of the same age group).

Another aspect of job insecurity in rural female employment is the predominance of the part time working day for women in rural areas. 77.7 % of the part-time employees were women according to this study, thoroughly confirming the 2009 INE data. This is important since on average less population is employed in the fieldwork as compared with the country as a whole, 11.6 % compared to the 13.2% at national level. In any case the difference between men and women is also noticeable for full-time jobs, since more than 90% of men have this type of contract, almost twenty percentage points above women. The prevalence of female part-time employment in rural areas has important social implications because it perpetuates the traditional role of women forced to accommodate the housework or children and people with special needs caretaking. The 2009 Labor Force Survey confirms this point, citing as the main cause why women choose part-time contracts not having found full-time work and having to assume domestic and caregiving responsibilities.

The tendency to part-time employment bears on the type of jobs and the remuneration package that women in the rural environment can reach. There is a twofold segregation phenomenon, both vertical and horizontal. The vertical segregation implies that women occupy the last positions of the labor scale, as non-qualified personnel and

administrative staff. The responsibility positions and those with a higher wage scale are mostly occupied by men. The horizontal segregation implies that, even though the services sector has a greater total occupation of men and women (52.6%), the sector concentrates mainly female work force, almost eighty percent of the total are women. What is more, the type of employment has a clear gender connotation since the activities typically carried out by women are related to hospitality, commerce, tourism, education, healthcare and public sector, which are in general the main opportunities of access to employment.

3.5. *Gender wage discrimination*

Linked to the type of employment, the working day and other factors of gender discrimination women earn on average a lower income than men in the rural areas. Additionally with a strong inequality in the revenue sharing rate between different wage ranges. The percentage of women who earn between the range of 400 € minus to 1,000 € is higher than men, while men dominate among the range of 1,000 € plus to 1,800 € plus.

A widening gender gap starting from monthly wages of more than 1000 euros helps understanding the wage gap. With each step up the wage scale the percentage of women compared with men gets smaller. In addition to the working day or the type of contract to which women have access, there are other factors that can help understand the wage discrimination, such as stereotypes of gender, occupational discrimination by the fact that employers see the working women as possible future maternity leaves without weighting the social security coverage as they do for the other medical or sick leaves for instance; this sentences women to be more employable in traditionally female jobs or sectors. Another aspect that explains the wage discrimination in the rural area is related to seniority, which is the key factor that leads to wage increases. For all the reasons stated above women not attain sufficient levels of seniority to match the revenues that men can reach.

The phenomenon of wage discrimination can result in a state of relative female poverty. MAFF study concludes that 56.8% of employed women's wage is between 400-1000 euros, which leads many women to social exclusion, the informal economy or to the housework tasks, socially undesirable situations from an equalitarian standpoint. As a matter of fact it would be interesting to have employment and "hidden" wages data in the informal economy, to see if there is greater impact in the female population: the underlying assumption states that there could be a greater number of irregular "contracts" for women due to the fact that they have to conform to a context of increasing difficulties for finding employment suitable to their needs and this is a characteristic feature of the services sector, which is where the highest female occupation force concentrates.

One last point that we wish to address is the tendency of families' arrival from the cities to the countryside, already cited in the La Caixa study in 2008. This process has been intensified with the economic crisis, since attractiveness of the cities has decreased due to the high rates of unemployment in general but in particular due to the tasks that affect women. Although the gender gap in certain indicators of employment and activity rate has been reduced, in Alonso, Lima and Trillo (2013) we show a scenario analysis where women's working conditions have deteriorated more than men's in the traditionally female sectors.

4. Women's employability and entrepreneurship in the rural environment

The scarce economic and employment opportunities women can access in rural areas have been focused mainly on self-employment, i.e. the implementation of business initiatives in different sectors. In particular, rural tourism has been one of the fundamental employment niches that women have found to diversify their economies, whereas on the other hand, it has helped to consolidate the population stability in different areas - Aguilar, Pérez, Lozano y Moreno (2009)-. However, there is still much to be done to take advantage of the current potential in terms of environmental, historic and cultural heritage; values and ways of life; identity, social cohesion and respect for diversity; use of endogenous resources and traditional activities, etc.

The Strategic Plan for Gender Equality in the Sustainable development of the rural environment (2011-2014) - SPGES hereinafter -, which outlines the development of Law 45/2007 and Law 3/2007 of equality sought to address the problem of double discrimination that occurs first for being a women and second for living and working in rural areas. SPGES focuses primarily on improving the employment conditions of women through training and promoting employment potential by joining traditional activities with technology use, promotion of technological innovation in companies, occupational training and guidance for women's employment in the rural environment; boosting professionalization of activities traditionally carried out by women; promoting online training; promoting farms' shared ownership; promoting development of facilities for child-care, elderly people and people in a situation of dependence. To increase female entrepreneurship in rural areas, the Plan suggests promoting training in businesses start-up and management; encouraging support and maintenance services in businesses start-up and management; promoting training in leadership and self-esteem for rural women, factors identified as weaknesses of the rural entrepreneurial women; it also shows the need to create networks of entrepreneurs and exchange experiences.

Our proposal is aimed at improving women's economic independence by encouraging employment through the endeavor in traditional activities but not particularly focused on agricultural production. The idea is to take advantage of the good image the rural environment currently counts on, the ecological, the 'going back to the roots' concept, etc. in absolute contrast to the mass consumption of homogeneous items, perishable, low quality and, sometimes, toxic – coming mostly from China-. The purpose is to build on the potential of the cultural and crafting tradition and converting them into a complement of tourist resources and on the production of first quality goods with a unique character and a singular brand, hand made by a network of women, that can range from food and pastries, textiles and embroidery, ceramics, basketry, leather, natural cosmetics, jewelry and costume jewelry, etc.

Designing this network of women producers would have to be done through online trading making use of the information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the improvement in women's educational level in the rural world (despite the "illustrated flight"). Developing an idea of this type will not only improve women's economic conditions, but also increase their participation in the decision-making process and in the organizations of an economic nature, etc.; while it is true that political participation - women mayors and councilors - and women associational activity in the rural areas has increased significantly.

This idea of entrepreneurship in the traditional goods production is not a new thing, during the last few years there have been a lot of online platforms marketing women made products in handicrafts, gastronomy, textile, leather, paper, etc. , as well as purchasing centers to eliminate intermediaries, etc. There is in fact an "online business website for entrepreneurial women in rural areas" called Artemur : it counts with sponsorship from the European Union, the Central Government through two Ministries of the previous government, the Federation of Rural Women's Associations (FADEMUR) and other organizations. However, the platform is not exclusively commercial and it is just acting as a guide to contact specific artisan women; additionally its scope seems to be very limited since it does not appear to be doing multiple searches and is not updated, therefore we believe this initiative has currently been abandoned.

5. Conclusions

Women in rural areas have been subject to a double discrimination due to their condition of women and for living in a rural area. The phenomena of depopulation, especially among better-educated women, masculinization, working on farms with the man as sole owner, etc., have brought many rural women on the verge of poverty and social exclusion. The specific problems of women in rural areas have not been a priority object of analysis and there is difficulty to track over time due to the lack of statistical information

However, the laws of equality between men and women, sustainable development of the rural environment and shared ownership of the farm have been a great starting point to improve rural women situation starting from 2007, which has been visible in the progress women have made in economic, social and political life participation as well as in rural tourism self-employment (among others). Our proposal therefore focuses on designing a trade network with

a singular brand, taking advantage of the possibilities offered by ICTs to provide a platform for business innovation in traditional products linked to the image of "the rural authenticity".

Notwithstanding, progress requires stable policies and long-term rural development in equality. Unfortunately, the recently approved Law 14/2013 to support entrepreneurs and their internationalization which contains general ruling for entrepreneurial training in schools, tax benefits and certain formal requirements, does not contain a single reference to women and/or to the rural environment in its almost one hundred pages.

Improving living conditions and employment of women in rural areas should be a priority objective of the gender and development policies. Only permanent results may be achieved through policies stable and permanent improvement over time. The measures carried out at once can create a false sense of care and intermediate-term problem worse.

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