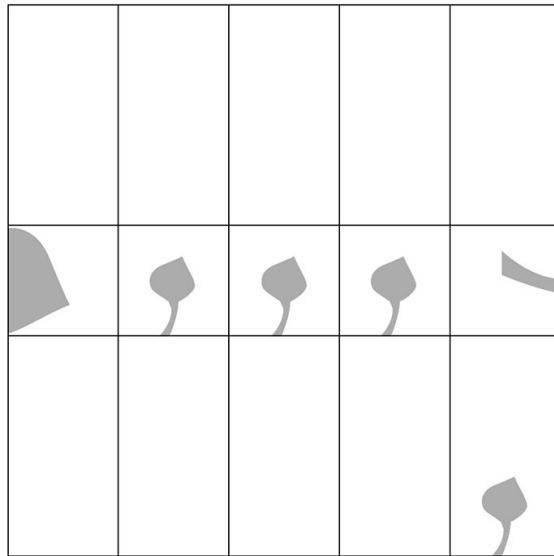


Extended abstract

*Diagnosis of Women's Entrepreneurship
in the Wine Sector
of Castilla y León, Spain*



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DOI: 10.4422/ager.2026.1

ager

Revista de Estudios sobre Despoblación y Desarrollo Rural
Journal of Depopulation and Rural Development Studies

Highlights:

1. Women's entrepreneurship in the wine sector faces bureaucratic, financial, and work-life balance barriers.
2. Women wine entrepreneurs display heterogeneous profiles, with diverse trajectories and a frequent urban background.
3. Informal learning and emotional and financial support are crucial in contexts of limited specialised advisory services.
4. Lack of recognition and economic security hinders business consolidation in the early stages.

Abstract: This article analyses women's entrepreneurship in the wine sector in rural Castilla y León, with the aim of identifying the factors influencing women's entrepreneurial trajectories, the barriers they face, and the forms of support and needs associated with their business activity. The study adopts a quantitative approach based on the administration of an ad hoc questionnaire to a sample of 100 women who manage wineries in the region. The results reveal the heterogeneity of entrepreneurial profiles, characterised by diverse educational trajectories and a significant presence of women with an urban background. The findings highlight the relevance of informal learning in the development of entrepreneurial competencies, as well as the importance of emotional and financial support, alongside more limited access to specialised advisory services. The main barriers identified include bureaucracy, access to finance, and work-life balance constraints. This study provides empirical evidence that contributes to understanding women's entrepreneurship in the wine sector as a diverse and dynamic process, shaped by life and professional trajectories, informal learning processes, and the different phases of the entrepreneurial cycle in rural contexts.

Keywords: Rural development; rural women; empowerment; gender equality.

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction and justification

Rural women play a fundamental role in the social, economic and demographic sustainability of rural territories. However, their life and professional trajectories unfold within contexts shaped by structural gender inequalities, limited access to employment opportunities and productive resources, and reduced availability of public services and infrastructure. These dynamics are particularly visible in predominantly rural regions such as Castilla y León (an autonomous community in northwest Spain), characterized by persistent depopulation, ageing and masculinization processes.

Previous research has highlighted that women living in rural environments experience a form of "triple discrimination": based on gender, territorial location and the persistent difficulties in reconciling work and family responsibilities. In this scenario, female outmigration—especially among young and highly educated women—has reinforced demographic imbalances and weakened local development processes. Female rootedness in rural territories therefore emerges as a key factor for long-term demographic and socio-economic sustainability.

Within this framework, female entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as a strategic pathway for generating employment opportunities, strengthening territorial attachment and revitalizing rural economies. Nevertheless, rural women entrepreneurs continue to face significant barriers, including limited access to financial resources, restricted professional networks, administrative burdens and gender-based inequalities. Despite growing interest in rural entrepreneurship, the scientific literature has largely focused on urban contexts or on entrepreneurship in general terms, paying limited attention to the specific experiences of rural women and even less to particular productive sectors.

The wine sector represents a particularly relevant case study. Traditionally masculinized, it combines strong territorial identity, family heritage, and increasing innovation potential. Although women have historically participated in viticulture and winemaking, their entrepreneurial roles have often remained invisible. Analysing female entrepreneurship within this sector allows for a deeper understanding of how gender, territory and productive tradition intersect in rural contexts.

This study seeks to address this gap by analysing female entrepreneurship in the wine sector of Castilla y León, contributing empirical evidence to better understand

women's entrepreneurial trajectories, motivations, barriers and support systems within a rural productive environment.

2. Objectives, methodology and sources

The main objective of this research is to analyse female entrepreneurship in the wine sector of Castilla y León in order to identify: (1) the factors influencing women's entrepreneurial trajectories; (2) the barriers they face; and (3) the support systems and needs associated with their business activity.

A quantitative approach was adopted. The accessible population was identified through the Spanish Central Business Directory (DIRCE) and the official registers of the thirteen Protected Designations of Origin (PDOs) in the region. Out of 649 wineries identified, 140 were led by women and constituted the target population. The final sample consisted of 100 women entrepreneurs selected through simple random sampling, ensuring territorial and business diversity. The sample size was calculated using the finite population formula (90% confidence level; 5% margin of error).

Data were collected between June 2023 and January 2024 through an ad hoc questionnaire administered via email, telephone and face-to-face interviews, and during sector-related events. The questionnaire design was informed by an exploratory phase that included participation in sector conferences and a review of literature on female entrepreneurship, rural development and gender studies. The instrument underwent a two-round expert validation process involving 15 specialists, achieving high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.96).

Data were analysed using Sphinx® statistical software. Analytical categories included: socio-demographic characteristics; formal and non-formal education; entrepreneurial trajectory and family background; support networks; perceived barriers; development of transversal competencies; and current business needs.

3. Results

The results reveal a heterogeneous profile of women entrepreneurs in the wine sector. Most participants (78%) own both vineyard and winery, indicating a high level of involvement across the entire production chain. The sample shows territorial diversity across the region's main PDOs, particularly Ribera del Duero and Rueda.

Generational diversity is significant, with participants distributed across age groups ranging from under 36 to over 48 years. Notably, 66% of the women were born

in urban environments, suggesting processes of return migration or rural relocation. No significant differences were found between rural- and urban-born women regarding perceived entrepreneurial barriers.

Regarding education, the majority of participants hold medium-to-high formal qualifications: 34% have a university degree, 15% a master's degree, and 17% vocational training qualifications. However, formal education is not always directly related to viticulture, indicating knowledge transfer from other professional fields. Non-formal training also plays a crucial role: 66% attended entrepreneurship-related courses (e.g., accounting, marketing, digital skills). Even more significantly, 95% highlighted experiential and informal learning as fundamental for developing entrepreneurial competencies.

Motivational factors are diverse. The most prominent motivations include achieving professional goals (63%), continuing family tradition (53%), applying personal skills (19%), and breaking away from traditional employment models (12%). Importantly, 57% of participants reported no prior female entrepreneurial role models in their families, underscoring their agency and resilience.

Support networks are essential. Emotional support was mentioned by 93% of participants, economic support by 75%, training support by 63% and prior advisory services by 57%. These findings underline the importance of both relational and material resources.

The main barriers identified include bureaucratic procedures (92%), limited access to financing (64%), gender inequalities (42%), work-life balance difficulties (33%) and challenges in team building (31%). These obstacles are particularly pronounced during the early stages of entrepreneurship.

Finally, the analysis of perceived needs shows that while basic and self-fulfilment needs are generally satisfied, economic security and social recognition remain fragile, especially among entrepreneurs with fewer than six years of experience. Business consolidation appears to be strongly associated with time and accumulated experience.

4. Discussion

The findings confirm that female entrepreneurship in the rural wine sector is not a homogeneous phenomenon but rather a complex interplay of gender, territory, education and life-course dynamics. The significant presence of urban-born women suggests processes of rural reconfiguration and potential knowledge transfer from urban professional environments to rural productive spaces.

The high educational level challenges traditional representations of rural areas as educationally disadvantaged contexts. At the same time, the centrality of informal and experiential learning highlights the need to reconsider dominant training models.

In rural entrepreneurship, situated knowledge and practice-based competencies are critical.

Motivational diversity indicates that entrepreneurship is not merely an economic necessity but also a pathway for identity construction, empowerment and territorial commitment. The absence of family entrepreneurial background among many participants further emphasizes women's agency in challenging traditional gender roles within a masculinized sector.

Barriers such as bureaucracy and financing difficulties align with previous research on rural female entrepreneurship. However, the persistence of gender inequalities and work-family reconciliation challenges underscores the structural dimension of these obstacles, particularly in contexts with limited public services.

The differentiation of needs according to entrepreneurial stages suggests that policy interventions should be tailored to the business life cycle, with reinforced support during initial phases.

5. Conclusions

This study provides empirical evidence on female entrepreneurship in the wine sector of Castilla y León, contributing to the understanding of rural women's entrepreneurial processes from an integrated gender and territorial perspective.

The results demonstrate the heterogeneity of entrepreneurial profiles, the centrality of informal learning processes and the importance of emotional and economic support networks. Barriers are not only structural but also stage-dependent, requiring differentiated policy responses.

Recognizing multiple ruralities and diverse entrepreneurial trajectories is essential for designing inclusive and context-sensitive public policies.

6. Future directions

Future research should integrate qualitative approaches to deepen the understanding of subjective meanings, territorial attachment processes and gender negotiations within the wine sector. Comparative studies across different rural sectors and regions would allow identification of contextual specificities. Longitudinal research designs could further examine business sustainability over time and assess the long-term impact of public support policies.