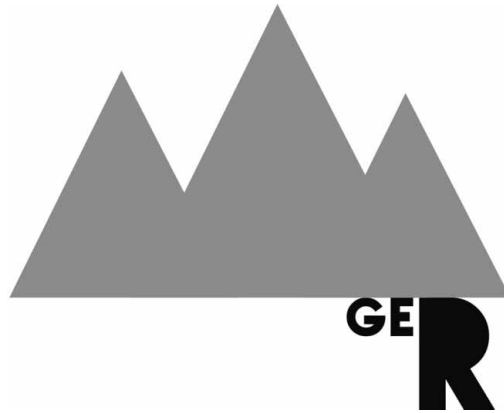


Extended abstract

*Does Vocational Training Have the Potential
to Attract Young People to Rural Areas?
Educational, Social and Territorial Factors
of Rootedness in Andalucía (Spain)*



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Highlights:

1. The educational pathways followed have an impact on the expectations of rural youth to rooting themselves.
2. Access to educational pathways varies according to social origin and gender.
3. The Intermediate Vocational Training (FPGM in its Spanish acronym) generates job expectations closer to the territory of origin.
4. The bachelor's degree projects academic and employment expectations outside the rural environment.
5. The FPGM is evidenced as a mechanism of rootedness to the territory, although in conjunction with other factors.

Abstract: This paper analyses the relationship between post-compulsory educational pathways and the expectations of rural youth to settle in rural areas by means of a survey carried out in 2022 among students from different educational pathways and fields of study in seven secondary schools in six rural Andalusian municipalities. First, we analyse the factors that influence the choice of academic or vocational pathway by rural students in the transition to post-compulsory education. Second, it explores whether there are differences in students' academic and mobility expectations depending on the pathway taken. Thirdly, we analyse the aspirations to remain in the territory according to the pathway followed, gender, social origin and the level of vulnerability of the territory. The results show differences in access to educational pathways according to social origin and gender. At the same time, the pathways contribute to projecting different academic and employment expectations in rural students. Finally, the potential of Intermediate Vocational Training as a factor of rootedness to the territory is evidenced, although this does not act in a singular way, but rather in conjunction with the territorial context, gender and social origin.

Keywords: Rural youth, education, educational pathways, employment, migration.

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction and justification

The migration of young people from rural areas poses a threat to the social and demographic sustainability of rural Spain. On the one hand, the exodus of young people contributes to the ageing of the rural population. On the other hand, the disproportionately high migration of young women is leading to a demographic imbalance known as masculinisation (Camarero et. al, 2009). Retaining young people and reducing gender inequalities are therefore cornerstones of demographic sustainability in rural areas.

In this paper, we analyse the role that post-compulsory educational pathways play in shaping the academic and employment prospects of young people in rural Andalusia, as well as the relationship between these pathways and territorial rootedness. This is important due to the role that education and training play in the processes of geographical mobility. Recently, there has been a noticeable trend for skilled young people in Spain to migrate from their places of origin, both rural and urban, to the major cities, with Madrid and Barcelona being the main receiving centres (González-Leonardo et al., 2022; González-Leonardo & López-Gay, 2021). In the particular case of young people from rural areas, the need to pursue higher education outside their home community means that education is a driving force behind migration and the phenomenon of rural depopulation. This runs counter to the role that education should play in promoting social cohesion (Santamaría-Cárdaba & Sampedro, 2020, p. 163).

2. Objectives, methodology and sources, areas of study

The hypothesis of this study is that the post-compulsory pathway of Intermediate Vocational Training (FPGM in its Spanish acronym) is more likely to result in a greater desire for rootedness in the rural environment, whereas the Baccalaureate, in contrast, primarily fosters academic and employment aspirations linked to migration. In order to explore this, the following objectives were set. The first

is to socially profile the students enrolled in the FPGM and Baccalaureate pathways selected in the sample design, using contingency analysis. The next objective is to use the same approach to analyse the academic and career aspirations of students on both pathways. Finally, the study compares whether the FPGM pathway leads to a greater likelihood of rootedness than the Baccalaureate, using logistic regression analysis and controlling for variables related to the dimensions of the analysis, such as gender, social class and territorial context.

This paper uses primary data from the research project 'Educational pathways, development and rural sustainability: the relationship between academic pathways and expectations of rootedness in rural young people' (UPO-1260928). In 2022, a survey was carried out among young people enrolled in the final year of the educational pathways (FPGM and Baccalaureate) and areas of study in seven secondary schools in six rural municipalities in Andalusia. The centres were selected on the basis of the Rural Vulnerability Index (RVI), which allowed the identification and selection of communities with varying levels of local development and economic focus (agriculture, industry, services). The sample of schools included in the study consisted of seven secondary schools (IES in its Spanish acronym), three of which were located in municipalities with a high RVI and four in areas with a low RVI. One Baccalaureate and two FPGM pathways were selected from each educational centre, taking into account the predominant economic sector in the region and the diversity of educational opportunities available. This resulted in the inclusion of 18 different qualification types. The survey was administered to the 272 students enrolled in these programmes, with a response rate of 62.9%.

3. Results

Two points should be highlighted regarding the social profile of students on these pathways. Firstly, social class is a factor in the distribution of students, as there is a higher concentration of parents with a higher level of education among Baccalaureate students. Secondly, the FPGM pathway is heavily male-dominated, especially in courses related to industrial manufacturing or IT.

In terms of academic and career prospects, the Baccalaureate pathway is almost exclusively oriented towards university. This means leaving the rural area, at least on a temporary basis. Career prospects are more likely to involve working outside the place of residence, usually in a city within Andalusia or in another Autonomous

Community. However, the FPGM pathway offers a significant proportion of its students the prospect of immediate entry into the labour market, as well as the possibility for academic progression through access to higher level vocational education and training (FPGS in its Spanish acronym). Finally, career prospects tend to be oriented towards employment close to the place of residence, with the exception of IT qualifications, which are predominantly oriented towards urban areas.

With regard to the main hypothesis of the study, our logistic regression model shows that the educational pathway is the most significant predictor of rootedness: FPGM students are 4.675 times more likely to want to stay in their home town than Baccalaureate students. However, an analysis of the predictors of rootedness for each pathway separately shows that FPGM students are influenced by their perceptions of local working conditions (2.963) and their family's financial situation (1.612). This highlights the central role of social class in predicting rootedness. In contrast, the likelihood of staying in the local area among Baccalaureate students is more influenced by factors such as gender (4.548)—with males being more likely to stay—and attachment to the place of residence (1.800). While these findings underline the importance of educational pathways in determining rootedness, they also highlight the interplay between these pathways and factors such as gender, social class and territory.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Social disparities in access to educational pathways highlight the ways in which the social structure is reproduced through the students' social class backgrounds and the consequent propensity to invest their future in education (Elías et al., 2020; Langa, 2018; Martín Criado & Bueno Gómez, 2017). Gender bias in pathway selection is also evident, consistent with the literature reviewed (Elías & Daza, 2019; Jacovkis et al., 2020; Merino & Martínez, 2012; Termes, 2022).

In terms of shaping academic and employment expectations in the short to medium term, there is evidence that the baccalaureate—and its eventual extension to university—may contribute to the processes of human capital depletion observed in rural areas (González-Leonardo et al., 2020, 2022; González-Leonardo & López-Gay, 2021), although this effect is more pronounced at the regional level than at the national level, as is the case in other parts of Europe (Mærsk et al., 2023). With the exception of sectors that are less established in rural areas, the FPGM seems to contribute to creating greater expectations of employment in the area of origin. This

would seem to confirm the initial hypothesis, suggesting that the FPGM is a stronger factor in keeping the population in the local area than the Baccalaureate, with potential implications for tackling the problem of depopulation in certain areas.

However, it has been shown that the potential of the FPGM to influence local rootedness does not operate in isolation, but rather in conjunction with other factors such as territorial context, gender and social class. It may even be worth exploring to what extent the FPGM is less a factor of rootedness than a reflection of academic choice conditioned by social class, gender, or both. In this sense, the choice of pathways would not only determine academic and employment aspirations, but also reflect differentiated social positions. All this takes place in a global context where education is driving the concentration of human capital in large urban areas (González-Leonardo et al., 2020, 2022; González-Leonardo & López-Gay, 2019, 2021). Ultimately, this leads us to reflect on the dual role of education in rural areas and its relationship to both the rootedness and, conversely, the residential mobility of young people (Corbett, 2007, 2009; Farrugia, 2016; Farrugia et al., 2014).

5. Next steps

The findings and conclusions of the article provide a solid basis for further research into this issue, including the possibility of widening the study population. This would, for example, allow for the inclusion of a significant number of people with a migrant background. An increase in the size of the population and a longitudinal approach would undoubtedly help to analyse, among other things, educational pathways and transitions, as well as changes in residential mobility. Furthermore, future research would do well to include additional factors that would allow a more precise operationalisation of the analytical dimensions, such as social class.

Nevertheless, and despite these limitations, the study provides an opportunity to explore in greater depth the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings and findings of recent international literature on the residential mobility of young people. It paves the way for the development of international comparative studies. Finally, it is proposed to conduct research on the materialisation of expectations and representations, with a focus on the next stages of life, particularly during the process of labour market integration. The authors are currently engaged in work to address these challenges through a series of research studies and involvement in national and international networks (González et al., 2021).