

Extended abstract

*Analysis and Characterization of Good Rural
Development Practices Undertaken
by Women in Spain*



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Highlights:

1. The uncertainties of the rural environment are a transcendental challenge for territorial development.
2. Innovation and sustainability must be the key principles on which actions are based.
3. The analysis of 600 cases of Best Practices located in Spain includes their thematic and special study.
4. Special attention to entrepreneurship by rural women.
5. The results show a wide margin for improvement in the criteria that define these actions.

Abstract: Despite the notable progress that the rural environment has experienced in recent years, the uncertainties that define it continue to be a challenge for territorial development. The need to act in the face of this situation, together with the new innovative and sustainable trends, the Good Practices of rural development are presented as optimal opportunities to confront the different problems and promote territorial development. This article presents the thematic and territorial analysis of different Best Practices in the Spanish rural area, the main focus of the study being the role played by women in general and in cases of entrepreneurship in particular, since it is mostly entrepreneurship that allows them to remain in the rural environment and thus develop their life project favourably. The results suggest that territorial development based on these experiences has a wide margin for improvement, so a proposal linked to the redefinition of the criteria for Good Practices is presented.

Keywords: Territorial development, opportunities, rural Spain, rural women leadership.

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction and justification

From the point of view of Territorial Planning, the rural world is fundamental for the social and economic structure of the region, housing a valuable cultural and natural heritage. However, the rural environment is not uniform and presents diverse realities, determined by demographic factors such as age structure, gender or mobility. Despite progress during the 20th century, uncertainties persist that hinder rural development.

The concept of sustainability, linked to sustainable development, is key to facing these challenges, requiring innovations that promote the efficient use of resources and respond to social needs. Good Rural Development Practices, by promoting innovative and sustainable projects, are essential to improve the quality of life in these territories.

The participation of women is essential in these processes, because despite progress, they continue to face barriers to accessing the labour market. Initiatives that promote gender equality and access to employment have increased opportunities for women in rural areas. This article reflects on Good Practices led by women, as essential agents for the sustainable development of towns, promoting projects that contribute to the transformation of the rural environment.

2. Objectives, methodology and sources, areas of study

The main objective of this study is to analyse different cases of Good Practices in rural development in Spain, with a particular emphasis on the role of women in their implementation. To do this, we seek to design a homogeneous database based on the review of catalogues of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, published between 2010 and 2021. The analysis focuses on identifying the main themes, studying

the territorial distribution of the practices and define the criteria that characterize Good Practices, differentiating between essential and non-essential.

The research also focuses on rural entrepreneurship led by women, determining the number of cases in which they have played a key role. The database includes information on the subject, location, financing and authorship of the practices, classifying non-essential criteria into three levels of consideration. The final objective is to propose a redefinition of the essential criteria to improve the value of Good Practices and establish a unified methodology for their analysis and characterization

3. Results

The analysis of Good Practices (BBPP) in rural development in Spain shows great diversity both in the themes of action and in their spatial distribution. The most notable areas include agriculture, environment, tourism and social revitalization, with a significant number of BBPP in fishing, although its prevalence should not dismiss other areas.

Entrepreneurship emerges as a key factor, especially in sectors such as fishing, agri-food and local services, with a notable tendency for women to lead these initiatives. The data indicate that 92.18% of entrepreneurship cases are led by women, compared to 7.82% by men, also highlighting gender differences in the thematic areas of action. Women tend to be more involved in areas such as fishing, sustainable rural tourism and local resource management, while men focus more on agriculture and youth training.

Regarding spatial distribution, the majority of BBPPs are concentrated in the autonomous communities of the south and northeast of the peninsula, with a decrease towards the interior of the country. However, not all rural areas seem to benefit equally from these initiatives, especially those most affected by problems such as depopulation and aging. This geographical disparity may be due to the lack of full representation of BBPPs in the most affected areas, suggesting that the success of the practices is linked to the social capital of the areas, where the participation of the local population facilitates their development.

The analysis of Good Practices (BBPP) of rural development focuses on the essential criteria that define a practice as such, as well as on non-essential criteria, which although are not necessary for its classification as BBPP, can increase its value and effectiveness. The essential criteria are common to all the practices analysed, while

the non-essential criteria are those that are considered to improve the quality of the initiatives, and are classified into three levels according to their importance. The study reveals that, while all practices meet the essential criteria, non-essential criteria vary in their frequency and relevance depending on the type of practice. For example, in the case of agriculture-related practices, level 1 non-essential criteria are the most valued, followed by level 2 and level 3. Although these criteria are not mandatory, their absence could negatively affect success of the initiatives.

The categorization of the criteria allows us to assess the possibility of reconfiguring the essential criteria, integrating non-essential level 1 criteria to improve the potential of Good Practices in the future, thus increasing the probabilities of success in rural development. In summary, the study highlights the importance of integrating non-essential criteria strategically to strengthen Good Practices and guarantee their long-term effectiveness.

4. Discussion

The analysis of Good Practices (BBPP) for rural development in Spain shows an uneven distribution, with a focus on agriculture, environment, and tourism. However, these practices are not concentrated in areas most affected by depopulation, aging, and masculinization, as their success requires active human resources and social capital. Entrepreneurship is crucial for rural women, offering an opportunity to stay in rural areas in the absence of other job options. Women tend to introduce innovations and focus on sustainability, making them key drivers of rural development. The study suggests adding the creation of direct employment as a new essential criterion to enhance success and tackle depopulation.

5. Conclusions

The Spanish rural environment faces challenges like aging, masculinization, and depopulation, making a "rural renaissance" difficult. However, positive factors such as willingness to change, identity, and development opportunities can help sustain these areas. Good Practices (BBPP) in rural development play a key role in fostering innovation and sustainability. Despite the variety of BBPP, there is a gap between disadvantaged areas, like inland Spain, and more resource-rich semi-rural regions. Women increasingly

lead rural entrepreneurship projects, reflecting resilience and the lack of job options. This study stresses the importance of incorporating gender perspectives and job creation in future BBPP to ensure rural sustainability and success.

6. Next steps

This study on Good Practices in rural Spain identifies various opportunities for future research and improvements in the development of rural projects, especially those driven by women. Below are the main proposals:

- Creation of a georeferenced database of Good Practices: It is recommended to develop an accessible national platform, ideally managed by Public Administrations, that allows the generation of a knowledge network to continually improve production processes, products and cooperation in rural areas.
- Long-term evaluation (Ex Post) of the cases analysed: It is crucial to carry out a systematic evaluation of the impact of Good Practices on territorial development, considering aspects such as employment, quality of life, social cohesion and environmental sustainability. The lack of these evaluations weakens the quality of current interventions, which is why it is recommended to include BBPPs in the Ex Post evaluation of Rural Development Programs.
- Interinstitutional collaboration and local participation: It is essential that those responsible for territorial planning work together with local actors and researchers to develop strategies that promote innovation and cooperation. Furthermore, it is essential that public policies are aligned with the real needs of the rural environment and that the local population is listened to define and implement an appropriate rural development strategy that addresses the specific problems of each territory.