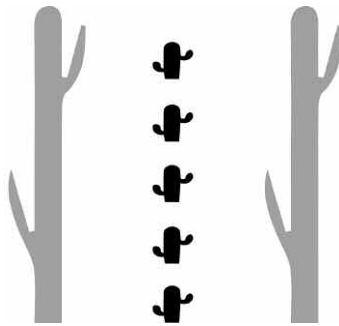


**Extended abstract**

*Global Crisis and Rurality:  
Impact on Young Highly Qualified  
Women Entrepreneurs*



***Mireia Baylina (\*), Maria Dolors García Ramón (\*),  
Montserrat Villarino (\*\*), María Josefa Mosteiro (\*\*),  
Ana María Porto (\*\*), Isabel Salamaña (\*\*\*)***

***(\*) Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain***

***(\*\*) Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Spain***

***(\*\*\*) Universitat de Girona, Spain***

DOI: 10.4422/ager.2024.05

***ager***

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

*Highlights:*

1. Women apply the territorial values of sustainability to their work, care, and affection.
2. Tangible, local goods have shown a greater capacity to respond to global crisis.
3. Class allows empowers women in entrepreneurship, but it does not overcome their role in social reproduction.

*Abstract:* The article analyzes the impact of the pandemic on the rural entrepreneurship of highly qualified young women, outstanding in the current socioeconomic transformation of their territories. Their experience is significant because they constitute enormous potential for recapitalization processes in rural areas. The analysis is carried out from an intersectional perspective, taking the axes of gender, class and age, and using a qualitative methodology through in-depth interviews. The results show how the entrepreneurs extend the sustainability values that they defend in their projects towards their relationship with work, care and affection. Their class position gives them a social capital that enables them to resist oppression based on gender and age in the professional sphere. However, this position does not liberate them from the role in social reproduction. Through these particular experiences, we reflect on the capacity for resistance and resilience of people and rural territories in situations that can become ordinary in our lives.

*Keywords:* Pandemic, entrepreneurship, gender, class, age.

Mireia Baylina. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0365-4224>

E-mail: [mireia.baylina@uab.es](mailto:mireia.baylina@uab.es)

María Dolors García Ramón. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5262-2990>

E-mail: [mariadolors.garcia.ramon@uab.es](mailto:mariadolors.garcia.ramon@uab.es)

Montserrat Villarino. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6154-244X>

E-mail: [montserrat.villarino@usc.es](mailto:montserrat.villarino@usc.es)

María Josefa Mosteiro. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6354-3289>

E-mail: [pepa.mosteiro@usc.es](mailto:pepa.mosteiro@usc.es)

Ana María Porto. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9410-5457>

E-mail: [anamaria.porto@usc.es](mailto:anamaria.porto@usc.es)

Isabel Salamaña. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8724-3803>

E-mail: [isabel.salamana@udg.edu](mailto:isabel.salamana@udg.edu)

## *Extended abstract*

### **1. Introduction**

In a very short period, the COVID-19 pandemic became a global phenomenon that affected the daily lives of people around the world, being a profoundly geographical event. These changes transformed the spaces of homes, habits and geographies of daily lives, the operations of work and the dynamics of the global economy. Our priority as rural geographers focused on finding out the effect of the global crisis on the rural entrepreneurial women who are and have been the object of our study in recent years.

These women make up a very particular population. These are cosmopolitan young people, highly qualified, of rural origin, and with innovative projects closely linked to their territories. The beginning of their business projects took place during the economic crisis of the years 2007 to 2015, being part of a movement to return to rural areas of a certain social group in some Spanish and European areas (Monllor and Fuller, 2016; Author, 2017; Webster, 2017; Camarero and Rivera, 2024), who saw rural spaces as places of refuge. Despite having important barriers (access to land, capital, and the market), they start multifunctional business models, with which they not only face the difficulties of entering the labor market, organizing their own lives but with their activity they dispute gender, class and age barriers in rural areas.

### **2. Objective, methodology and sources**

In this article we analyze the professional and personal impact of the health crisis on these women, who are currently leaders in the economies of their territories. The analysis is carried out from the situated position of gender, age, and social class of the informants.

We expose the case of five highly qualified young women who have started businesses in rural areas of Catalonia (Baix Empordà and Solsonès, in the provinces of Girona and Lleida respectively) and Galicia (A Ulloa, province of Lugo). These are young adult women, born in the territories in which they invest today. Two are biologists -

one of them is also an environmentalist-, two have degrees in economics and business administration and management respectively, and another is an agricultural technical engineer and oenologist. Their projects are linked to agricultural production (sweet fruit from integrated production and quality wines), livestock (organic milk production and processing of dairy products), and services related to tourism (rural tourism and management of a network of rural houses) and with the production of knowledge (social creativity in rural areas). Two people have some family assets (land, houses) and three are starting from scratch. The family units are diverse: one lives alone, two live with their heterosexual partners and children, and two live without a partner with parents, grandmother and male siblings. Among the five informants there are four children. The information has been collected using a qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews and field diaries.

### **3. Results and discussion**

The pandemic finds entrepreneurs in a stage of economic recovery. Women who are dedicated to tourism, and in powerful international tourist destinations such as the Camino de Santiago or the Costa Brava, are experiencing a period of expansion with international visitors. Valeria (Solsonès), founder and manager of a cooperative for socio-environmental revitalization and sustainable development, carries out a process of accompaniment to the people who work for the territory, integrating the economic, symbolic, community and cultural dimensions. Alicia (livestock farmer, A Ulloa) finds herself in a contrasting reality: the preparation of a new professional project in cooperation with another livestock farmer; and an accident involving her mother, which places her as the only full-time worker on the farm, in the care of her mother and her grandfather. Mariona (Baix Empordà), is at the head of the family farm of dryland vineyards and fruit trees. The company carries out direct sales on the farm, in local markets, in quality restaurants, in addition to offering guided tours of the old winery, vineyard and tasting. Its location, in the heart of the tourist area of the Costa Brava, provides it with a national and international client.

The impact of the pandemic has been different depending on the activity. For tourism it meant an absolute stoppage and uncertainty for the future. However, the different types of mobility restrictions, in the progressive de-escalation, reconfigured tourist flows, growing the demand for local tourism, confirming that rural spaces adapted more quickly than other more consolidated destinations. Mariona (Baix Empordà), who sells wine and fruit directly in her farm and in the local market, began

to organize home delivery online. The reorganization of the sale also occurred post-lockdown. Mariona (Baix Empordà) explains that in June 2020 sales resumed in the local market despite health concerns and insecurity. Maintaining socialization spaces was valued, indicating how they contribute to the construction of rurality, in terms of gender and generation. On agricultural and livestock farms, the pandemic did not generate production or distribution problems since, as they are essential products, the industry continued buying milk from its producers. Likewise, the system of life on an agricultural family farm made confinement less burdensome because they practically followed the way of life typical of the family unit.

Once resettled in the new reality, reflections occur on the previous way of operating. Expressions such as *putting things in order*, *putting one's feet on the ground*, *returning to the origin* are common in their narratives, and they are all situated in the reaffirmation of the sustainability values that they have defended in their businesses. Agro-livestock entrepreneurs endorse the environmental, technical-productive, and socioeconomic dimensions of the agroecological paradigm. Rural development cooperative members reflect on the role of entrepreneurship in development processes. This leads them to reinforce more community services and to identify vulnerable groups in their territory.

An immediate consequence of the health crisis was the increase in work, particularly in agricultural and livestock farms, where work continued as a strategic sector and in which the confinement of workers was a problem. In all cases, the effects exacerbate already existing inequalities in terms of gender: women exacerbate their care, domestic and family work, highlighting their main role in social reproduction and the centrality of care in our lives and in the economy.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Faced with the pandemic situation, women have shown a great capacity to adapt. They have developed hardening strategies to resolve their daily lives and have allowed themselves to reflect in the medium term. The sustainability values that they defend in their business activities, which are highly focused on the resources of the territory, have been extended to their relationship with work, care, and affection.

Women dispute gender barriers. Their status as women makes them especially welcome in sparsely populated and masculinized contexts. However, their role as high-level entrepreneurs completely transgresses traditional gender roles in contexts

where rural mentalities still undervalue and question them. Their age, young adults, intensifies gender oppression in entrepreneurship. Their class position grants them social capital that enables them to undertake and productively resist gender and age oppression.

Class, however, has not freed them from their role in social reproduction, which has become more acute during times of confinement and de-escalation. The burden of domestic work and care has been exacerbated, especially for women with dependent people in the family. As resilient survival strategists in an unpredictable and vulnerable world, they evidence and express a finite physical and mental capacity, like the resources they defend. It is up to political decisions to listen to them and support them effectively if we do not want to do without their value in territories so lacking in women and in the face of the threat of a new rurality far from the territory.

### **5. *Future directions***

It would be interesting to know the consolidation of the changes induced by the pandemic both professionally and personally in the women considered. Likewise, it would be of interest to assess the impact of the pandemic on young entrepreneurial women in other rural areas of Spain and on other rural women not linked to entrepreneurship.