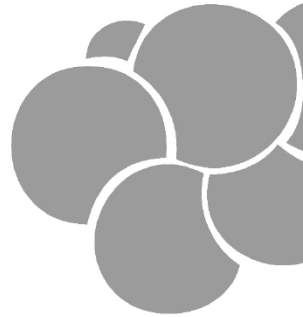


Extended abstract

*Failed Projects in the Implementation
of Leader Approach in Deep Rural Areas
of Andalusian Region (Spain):
Youth and Women*



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Highlights:

1. Young people are the most vulnerable actors setting out in terms of investment and under-representation.
2. Gender differences are imposed when setting out, especially among the young group.
3. Self-employment as a response to the crisis shown in the success rates of young people.
4. Rurality and remoteness penalize these territories and actors: it imposes more significant investments.
5. The total absence of projects limits the development of depopulated territories.

Abstract: The studies that analyse LEADER projects study those that have been implemented, ignoring those that have not been implemented. Our objective is to analyse the participation of key actors such as women and young people according to territorial typologies based on all the projects that started administrative proceedings between 2007-2015 in Andalusia. The results show the diversity of behaviours in the different profiles of the promoters analysed, varying according to the territorial typologies established. Men's primacy can be seen both in the number of projects presented and the average investment made, especially in the more rural areas. Women reduce the differences with men, especially in the closest and intermediate areas, especially if they are young or not. Young people show a very high level of success in the projects they initiate, forced by the crisis's need and in tune with the new emerging rural paradigm.

Keywords: LEADER, youth, women, rural development.

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1. Introduction and justification

The current situation of rural areas in Europe cannot be understood without taking into account the overall impact of the LEADER approach, including its role in mitigating population decline or ageing in many rural areas. The extent of the demographic challenge facing rural areas can vary greatly, even within the same region, as happens in Andalusia.

LEADER has been the subject of a considerable number of research studies, which have generally revolved around its social and economic effects or its innovative role in development processes, amongst others. However very little attention has been paid to failed projects, i.e. those which for a variety of reasons were never ultimately implemented, or about the sociodemographic profiles of the people involved, particularly women and young people.

2. Objectives, methodology and study areas

The main objective of this research is to analyse entrepreneurship amongst young people and women within the LEADER framework, according to a territorial typology based on the degree of rurality in Andalusia during the period 2007-2015. We will be focusing on these two profiles (young people and women) because they play a key role in rural development and the struggle against population decline. The period analysed coincided with the economic crisis that began in 2008, which resulted in the collapse of credit and had devastating effects in terms of the destruction of employment and cuts in social spending. Our research will also focus on the following more specific objectives: i) to evaluate the significance of these groups relative to their share of the overall population; ii) to quantify and evaluate their levels of success/failure by calculating the ratio between the two; iii) to quantify and evaluate the differences between these groups with regard to their investment capacity and assess the distribution of success/failure at a municipal level.

The source was the list of the projects processed (a total of 12,855) within the LEADER scheme between 2007 and 2015. This information was provided by the Regional Ministry of Agriculture of the Regional Government of Andalusia. In an initial analysis of this list, we distinguished between the projects that were finally executed (6,225) and those that failed (6,630). The resulting database was then subjected

to a quantitative analysis of the types of promoter and the degree of rurality. This was combined with a qualitative analysis of certain specific projects. As regards the territorial typology, we began by distinguishing three large categories (urban, intermediate and rural) within which we established various subcategories based on their degree of proximity to a city with over 50,000 people. From this we obtained 7 types of territory with varying degrees of rurality.

3. Results

The analysis applied in this research is socio-geographic, studying the level of participation in the LEADER programme, the success or failure obtained and the investment made, placing special emphasis on women and young people and including a territorial perspective based on the degree of rurality.

Participation

Women were clearly underrepresented in the applications for projects made during the study period: they initiated just 34.9 % of these projects, compared to the 65.1 % initiated by men. This is 13.6 percentage points less than the proportion of women in the total population and therefore implies a vast overrepresentation of men. Similar findings were made in our analysis by age: the participation of young people is very low with just 20 % of the projects presented. Even when we cross sex with age, women are still underrepresented: young women were involved in 7.4 % of the projects, while young men participated in 12.6 %.

Success/Failure

Most projects initiated by self-employed businesspeople fail, as shown by the success/failure ratio of 0.9, compared to the average of 1.07 for all the LEADER projects attributed to particular towns. Success rates vary considerably according to the type of promoter. The success ratio for female applicants was 0.87. Quite similar behaviour can be seen in the case of male entrepreneurs, albeit with a slightly higher success rate (0.91) than for women. As regards young entrepreneurs, there were more than twice as many successful projects as failed ones (2.3). There were differences in the types of failed projects according to sex: the projects proposed by women involved above all caring for the elderly, health care clinics, beauty salons, food-related businesses, hotels and accommodation; while in men the main types of business proposed were the transformation of agri-food products and restaurants.

Level of Investment

The average investment per project made by individual self-employed businesspeople was 58,655 Euros, almost 30,000 Euros less than the average. There was a stark difference between men and women: by women was €53,305, while men invested an average of €61,453. As regards young people, they invested an average of 52,981 euros, 9.7% less than the average for self-employed businesspeople. When sex was crossed with age, we observed that young women made the lowest investments with 43,670 euros (almost 15,000 Euros less than the average for self-employed businesspeople).

Territorial differences

The first finding is the absence of projects in many towns and villages classified as deep or remote rural. These are mainly located in mountain areas such as the Sierra Morena, Serranía de Ronda, Sierra de Segura, Alpujarra, or the Sierras de Baza and Filabres.

A second observation is that when analysed at a municipal scale, subtle variations can be observed compared to the overall trends for the different types of rural area. New contrasts between the sexes can also be detected. It is striking, for example, that there are areas such as the deep rural areas of Huelva, Cordoba and Granada in which no projects were promoted by self-employed men.

Success and failure had similar distributions across the different types of territory, with a slight majority of failed projects over successful ones. This majority was more pronounced above all in near and remote intermediate areas. In women, the dominance of failed projects over successful ones was more evident although our analysis at municipal level revealed that in many towns and villages in near and remote intermediate rural areas, there were higher levels of failure. Paradoxically, these were also the areas with the highest number of successful initiatives per town in absolute terms.

The projects promoted by young people are perhaps those with the greatest spatial repercussions. Although many projects fail, even in the more dynamic intermediate and near rural areas, it is important to realize that young people play an essential role in revitalizing the most depressed remote and deep rural areas, not so much in terms of the number of projects but more due to the fact that they are often the only source of private investment in areas in which private companies seem reluctant to invest.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Young people were the group with most difficulties when it came to setting up businesses during the economic crisis, as manifested in the number of projects undertaken and the size of the investment. The difference between the sexes is also notable: young women were the most vulnerable group in that they presented about half as many projects as their male counterparts despite being demographically very similar. They only places in which young women are more active than young men are in urban areas or areas very close to urban areas, where women make up a higher percentage of the population than in deep rural areas. The level of investment made by young people is another manifestation of the differences between the sexes: there is a vast difference between young men and women in terms of average investment, which can be up to three times as high in remote rural areas. In other words, the data reveal that women tend to be more active in the more accessible, better connected rural areas than in the more remote, deep rural ones.

The positive aspect of this review is that in spite of the underrepresentation of young people and the greater difficulties they face, their success levels can be as much as three times the average for self-employed people as a whole, a figure that is especially noteworthy in a period of serious economic crisis. It is also worth highlighting that their success rates were higher than those achieved in the preceding period of economic boom (2000-2006).

The territorial distribution of success and failure did not enable us to distinguish geographical areas that stood out as being particularly successful or unsuccessful. This should be regarded as a positive finding in the sense that none of these areas could be associated with the possible stigma of failure.

5. Future research

Our qualitative research, an essential aspect of this work, was interrupted by the lockdown declared in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This research, which will restart as soon as circumstances permit, will provide us with a first-hand account of the reasons behind the levels of success and failure of the different groups involved.