

Women's ventures in a rural context: Livelihood and identity

Mònica Carbó, Mireia Baylina and Maria Dolors Garcia-Ramon

Abstract

The Spanish rural area continues to undergo a process of transformation that has impacted society and space in an unequal way. The process of dismantling agriculture, together with demographic loss, have pushed rural society to seek alternatives so as to adapt to an economic model in crisis. In the south of Catalunya (Catalonia), the county of Terra Alta is an isolated region of strong agricultural tradition and weak industrialization, with the lowest regional rate of female employment. In this context, women of various ages have initiated business ventures in the area that have shown signs of economic vitality. Among their motivations is the need for employment, along with symbolic and ideological elements that reinforce the rural identity and are crucial for women's attachment to place. However, the success of their activity is highly influenced by their gender identity. The paper presents the experiences of women entrepreneurs in a rural context of a strong patriarchal character, showing how women's paid activity depends not only on the offer of employment or the possibility of businesses, but also on how women imagine themselves and on the social acceptance that their images generate.

Introduction

Since the 1980s, rural space in Spain has undergone a process of transformation that has had an unequal impact on the land and people. Reduced agricultural activity and population loss have led rural societies to seek alternatives to adapt to an economic model in crisis. The approach taken by the European Union Common Agrarian Policy has strengthened rural economic diversification along several fundamental lines, expanding services and activities related to leisure uses of rural areas, as well as

established production that is the basis of the agrarian economy (focusing on value-added and new activities) (García Coll and Sánchez Aguilera, 2005; Langreo, 2004). Rural development is closely linked to the development of society in general and to the perception people have of the rural space. This also explains the strong regional differentiation between sociogeographic areas in the country.

The idea of the countryside and its people has changed dramatically in recent years. The underestimating of rural society in comparison to urban dwellers has declined, and many rural areas share the forms of well-being of most urban counties due to a diversification of activities and a largely connected rural-urban economy (Aldomà, 2009). In this context, forms of collective imagery of rural life emerge, marked by the attraction of a rural lifestyle that is somewhat idealized. This ideal vision of the rural emphasizes values such as authenticity, natural life, ethnicity, ecology and cultural identity, and makes positive all that refer to this space. It is therefore a social representation of rurality that sees the territory as an imagined and idyllic landscape, but it does not take a totalizing sense because each context is ascribed by different imaginative forms (Halfacree, 2004). Reinforcement of the rural idyll has a direct impact on the material sense of the countryside: from this new conception arises an attraction to rural areas that results in the emergence of new niches of economic activity, such as rural tourism, reformulating the socioeconomic structure of these areas (Baylina and Salamaña, 2006; Bock, 2004; Cànoves et al., 2004; García Sanz, 2004; Hoggart and Paniagua, 2002; Kotsou et al., 2009; Möller, 2011; Morris and Little, 2005; Prados, 2000; Woods, 2011). Often it is the rural dwellers who feed this idealized image in order to strengthen new sources of income.

Rural women in Spain have adapted to this economic situation, taking advantage of the new employment opportunities (Camarero et al., 2005; Garcia-Ramon and Baylina, 2000; Pastor and Esparcia, 1998; Sampedro, 1996) offered within a labor market that reinforces their role as domestic agents (Maruani, 2002; Maruani, Rogerat and Torns, 2000). Activities related to expanded tourism and second residences are now added to industrial work and traditional service jobs. Therefore, the primary sources of employment for women are jobs related to an extension of domestic activities and services related to sales and restoration. More professional employment opportunities are in the minority, constituting a rather ephemeral part of the working life of rural women, and there is a progressive increase in women's self-employment that can be partly explained as a strategy when there are fewer opportunities for wage labor (Camarero, 2008).

Within this panorama, we need to consider three important factors in recent years: the education of women, a demand for services and increased mobility. Educated women enter the labor market with a belief that formal employment gives them personal independence, with direct access to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;

increased demand for services in rural areas makes employment possible; and the possibility of commuting (or telecommuting) to more distant workplaces slows the exodus of rural women.

In addition to these more tangible factors, we also need to look at the space as a source of symbolic identities that attach women to place. After twenty years of positive change in rural areas as a whole, the sense of belonging has grown (Díaz Méndez, 2005, 2006). The society's greater appreciation of the rural, together with improvement in the actual conditions of life there, decrease the detachment of the younger generation. Nevertheless, conditions for attachment are different for men and women. For the latter, material conditions are as crucial as the creation of a new gender identity that is built from a process of redefining the countryside (Sampedro, 2009). The attachment to place is built upon a new rural identity in which mobility and employment status, comparable to those they may have in the city, are essential. In this process, cultural and social capital are fundamental and become the main resources on which to base their professional and life initiatives.

Some of these initiatives involve setting up a business, an activity that has traditionally been associated with men, despite the rapid increase in women's business ownership all over the world. Entrepreneurship is understood here as a local process that has the capacity to transform a place. An entrepreneur is defined as a person who owns a business, assumes the risks associated with ownership, deals with uncertainties of coordinating resources and is in charge of day-to-day management of the business (Hanson, 2009). Simply by being entrepreneurs, women transgress gender norms. In this sense, it is interesting to examine the impact of these businesses led by women and reveal how entrepreneurship may change the life of a household, neighborhood or larger place, looking at other outcomes, such as expanding opportunities for women or shifts in gender relations.

This article depicts the experience of businesswomen in the county of Terra Alta (Catalunya) (Figure 1), a forgotten rural area, in economic and social terms, that is deeply traditional and that lacks a significant entrepreneurial base. In this context, we



Figure 1. County of Terra Alta, Catalunya (Spain). Source: Cartographic Institute of Catalunya, 2006.

want to outline women's contributions to the local economy and to explore the new division of labor in rural communities, in an effort to demonstrate the importance of gender identity in the everyday life of rural women who decide to stay in the country and become entrepreneurs.

Material and ideational rural space

The concept of "rural" or "rurality" refers to a rapidly changing reality in space and time that is increasingly difficult to define. One may envision a space that meets certain economic, social or physical criteria, but the concept does not say anything about borders or boundaries, and what is considered rural differs from place to place. As economic activities and urban lifestyles have become more widespread throughout this space, researchers have become less concerned with defining the exact scope of rurality and more concerned with analyzing what happens in those places that are widely perceived as rural (Aldomà, 2009). The "cultural turn" in human geography and the introduction of post-modern and post-structuralist theories into rural geography have provided a framework for exploring these meanings, making it possible to understand rurality as a social construct—that is, an imagined entity brought into being by particular discourses of rurality that are produced, reproduced and contested by many groups and individuals (Mormont, 1990).

Social constructions of rurality can easily lead to an imagined space that may have little correspondence with the actual "realities" of rural space or rural life. We need to go beyond cultural constructions of the idyll in order to find new ways of knowing and understanding rurality (Cloke, 2003). We need to take into account that rurality is not homogeneous, that rural areas are dynamic and that a counter-idyll character of rural areas is being increasingly recognized (Bell, 1997; Bunce, 2003; Cloke, 2003; Cloke and Little, 1997). In the current study, we are interested in the business work experience of women in the material, practiced and imagined rural context, in order to obtain the fullest knowledge of their work and life experience. Keith Halfacree's (2006, 2007a, 2007b) threefold model of rural space is a useful reference to engage with the idea of the rural and with the analysis we want to develop. Rural space comprises three intermeshed facets: rural localities (inscribed through spatial practices linked to production or reproduction), formal representations of the rural (framed within capitalist processes of production and exchange) and everyday lives of the rural (individual and social elements in the negotiation and interpretation of rural life). These three facets coexist not without tensions that, in turn, drive the dynamism of total space, enabling opportunities for rural restructuring (Woods, 2011).

Women's work experiences in businesses can be explained within this framework that links the material to the ideational. Everyday practices in place are territorially

grounded, and, as a result, the meanings and practices of gender vary from place to place, as well as among different groups of women in the same place (Bock, 2004; Bryant and Pini, 2009, 2011; Hanson, 2009; Little, 1999; Little and Panelli, 2003; Pratt and Hanson, 1994). Although this view of gender meaning and practices is contingent on geographic context and on other axes of difference that shape power relations, many people and institutions continue to treat all women or men according to preconceived beliefs about femininity and masculinity, assuming that certain abilities and behaviors are the norm of each gender (Hanson, 2009). These pervasive ideas that confront diversity are at the basis of labor market processes and entrepreneurship. This is why the structural dimension of gender has to be combined with symbolic and individual ones (Berg, 1997). In this sense, the structural dimension of gender in entrepreneurship, such as the sexual division of labor and the gendering of entrepreneurship at place, has to be related to the symbolic gender dimension (i.e., particular images of women and men that may have little to do with reality) and the individual gender dimension (the personal gender identity that may influence involvement in entrepreneurship).

The area: Terra Alta, a rural county in the south of Catalunya

In Catalunya, the rural population (municipalities of less than 2,000 inhabitants) numbers about 383,000, which is only 7% of the Catalan population but constitutes strong spatiality (70% of all municipalities) (IDESCAT, 2007). The past years have witnessed a demographic recovery that is ending decades of population decline, emigration and aging. This recovery is highly localized from a spatial point of view, primarily affecting the coast, the Barcelona metropolitan area and the inland cities and municipalities that are taking steps toward new tourist and service economies. The recession is affecting the smallest and most isolated municipalities. This process of economic diffusion and more urban behaviors has meant demographic growth based on migration, whether residential (suburbanization, returning population, retirees), workers (local and foreign) or new rural enthusiasts. More affordable housing, service job opportunities and commuting or telecommuting possibilities are the primary reasons for people to move to the country or remain there (García Coll and Sánchez Aguilera, 2005).

Southern Catalunya has experienced this rural revitalization in a slower, less intense way. Terra Alta, situated in the interior of Tarragona province, with 12,885 inhabitants and a population density of 17.3 inhabitants per square kilometer, is still one of the Catalan counties with a higher rate of population decline, a trend that has changed slightly since 2000, when the migration pattern was reversed and the rural exodus slowed. Nonetheless, natural growth remains negative, the population is elderly (27% over age 65, as opposed to 16% in all of Catalunya) and there is

a high ratio of males (108 to every 100 females), especially in the working age population (IDESCAT, 2007).

Terra Alta is an agrarian county (with 26.5% of the labor force working in agriculture), dedicated to producing grapes, olives, almonds, hazelnuts and cereal crops (IDESCAT, 2007). Vineyards are very important and are virtually the exclusive source of production in some towns and villages, where high quality wine is made.¹ Industrialization is low and income per capita is above average for Catalunya.² In recent years, the wealth of this county has been generated primarily by services (37.3% of GDP), followed by construction (31.2%), a sector that has grown immensely and generated considerable employment (IDESCAT, 2007).

This markedly agrarian economic profile has allowed Terra Alta to preserve a highly valued natural and rural landscape. The area also has a strong historical tradition: its mountains were among the principal sites of the Battle of the Ebro in 1938, during the Spanish Civil War. The battle left numerous marks on the landscape, creating sites with important cultural, historic, tourist and economic value. At the same time, the county's environmental characteristics and its position on the geographic, economic and demographic periphery led to a 1998 project to build several wind farms, some of which, despite much controversy, have not only prospered, but have positioned Terra Alta as the major wind-energy producing area in Catalunya in 2011. For these same reasons, southern Catalunya produces a high percentage of all energy generated in Catalunya (nuclear, geothermal, hydroelectric and wind), primarily exported to the rest of the country. This has generated conflicts over the use of the space, as well as protests ("Not in my backyard"; "Why always *here* [in southern Catalunya]?") against the impact on the population's health and safety and on the landscape (Nel.lo, 2003).

In this context, there is a strong gender division in the local labor market. Women constitute just 34.4% of the labor force,³ making this the county with the least gender equality in employment. In all age groups, employment is higher for men than for women. The numbers obscure women employed as domestics and those who work in the underground economy. Most officially employed women work in the service sector, especially in jobs connected with tourism, although there are some women in the food and textile industries, as well as in farming (IDESCAT, 2007).

The business sector has not been very relevant in Terra Alta. Low industrialization, few industries processing local agricultural products and the geographic isolation have created a business sector characterized by small enterprises of low capitalization. However, in recent years, new businesses have been started, primarily in the commercial and service sectors, linked to tourism and led by women.⁴ A new concept of rurality throughout Catalan and Spanish society, the exploitation of the area's natural and cultural resources, and the European Union LEADER Program funds⁵ received three times since 1989 have led to the creation of a socioeconomic tapestry

that complements the agrarian income, puts the brakes on rural exodus and preserves the landscape and environment. The businesses started by women include rural tourism, hotels, restaurants, adventure sports, tourist guide services, wine cellars, and artisan or agricultural shops.⁶ These are the work opportunities with the greatest potential to generate employment for women, together with work as domestics or in specialized institutions serving the elderly, babies and children.

Methodology and the sample of rural women

This study unveils the experience of rural women entrepreneurs, exploring the significance of gender to their everyday life and their business decisions. A qualitative research design was chosen to reveal the women's individual perspectives and experiences. Intensive research permits an emphasis on explaining processes, changing conditions, organization, circumstances and the construction, negotiation and reconstruction of meanings and identities (Cloke et al., 2004). It also enables researchers to consider themselves active and reflexive in the process of constructing information, so that "giving voice to others" becomes an integral part of the research process. We engaged participants in in-depth, semi-structured interviews, holding conversations in which the nature of the interaction produces new information or insight about the topic (Falconer al-Hindi and Kawabata, 2002). We also employed various degrees of participant observation. Researchers have been observers in different types and degrees of participation (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002), ranging from living in the community and taking part in everyday activities (such as leisure and cultural events), conversing and consciously observing people and situations and simply hanging out, but always recording what is observed. These qualitative methods, which served as our primary source of information, were supplemented by quantitative data that was used to contextualize the fieldwork. Specifically, we collected and analyzed socioeconomic statistics provided by national, regional and local authorities. All fieldwork was performed in 2009.

We interviewed fifteen businesswomen living in different villages in Terra Alta. Participants were selected purposefully with the aim of maximizing variations in age, economic sector and geographical setting. The women were contacted through personal relations, using the snowball technique and directly addressing those entrepreneurs whom we were interested in interviewing given the nature of their business or their own characteristics. To obtain a depth and range of information, as well as to achieve comparability of results, we designed an interview guide with open-ended key questions. The main themes that structured these questions were: professional and personal career, with particular emphasis on the motivations for starting a business, its development and their professional fulfilment as a businesswoman; work-life

balance; and future perspectives. All interviews were transcribed, coded with concepts that arose from the data, and analyzed according to both our predefined themes and new ones emerging from the process.

We also conducted semi-structured interviews with three local policy agents, with the aim of obtaining information about the business sector in the county, women's economic situation, implementation of gender policies and rural local development. The information provided by these interviewees was highly useful for documenting the context of the research.

The women who participated were 29 to 65 years of age. This wide range was intentional, as we sought to gather information about motivations, experiences and expectations in relation to the life cycle. Most were married or living as a couple (11) and had children of various ages (12). They ran small tourism-related businesses with no, or few, employees, and 10 of them owned the businesses in question. All the women completed primary education, and many had professional or university degrees. Their studies were related to tourism, administration, environmental science, anthropology, ethnology or restoration. Others gained professionalism through their work as farmers or dressmakers within their family. Despite their background, many had agreed to undergo specific training for their current jobs. Some of the women did not have previous paid work experience, either because they were still young or because they had been housewives. In the latter case, they became entrepreneurs due to external circumstances, such as a husband's unemployment or death or a father's retirement from the family business.

Findings

The start: Motivations and support

Women start their own business because of a lack of salaried jobs. They also express the will to stay in the county, the possibility of combining a flexible economic activity with domestic and family work, and the perception of business potential. The family's traditional economic activity and institutional assistance are other important considerations.

I chose to come here to live. This decision meant that I would have to get busy and find work to survive. Since there are limited opportunities and they don't pay well, self-employment was a good option so I could create my own job. Since I have always felt it is very important to take care of nature, I directed my business toward this specialization: an educational and environmental guide (Clara, 36, tourist agency).

It is complicated, inheriting a family business. A lot of people come to you and say: "Oh! This has changed so much!" But I think we have to evolve! Anyway, I think we're a great team because my parents contribute their experience and their daughters add the education we've acquired. We complement each other. It is evident that the work has evolved. Thirty three years ago we didn't work the way we do now—and I think we do a better job now! But the reason is that we have our education and they have much more experience, and we keep improving! (Neus, 30, hotel).

As described earlier, one of the factors that strongly influenced the economic diversification of the county was the three offerings of community aid through the LEADER program (1989-2006),⁷ which focused on four sectors: tourism, agriculture, women and youth. As a result, many women have been attracted to this program by the advantages it offers, and they have primarily requested assistance to create rural tourism and hotel establishments.

The house was deteriorating and so we made a decision. At that time the European Community's LEADER program came out. We talked to the family and we decided to make it into a rural house. I was 50 years old, so I could still work hard. If we participated in the LEADER program, we had to complete the work in a year and a half and we decided to do it. (Alba, 54, rural house).

Well, it's been very good for me because I am a woman, younger than 25, there was nothing else in the village, and all of these things added points in my case. They gave us the most that they could give, the maximum aid. It's a great help! If I had been male, I wouldn't have had as many points; if I had been older than 25, same situation... but I met almost all the requirements and it worked really well for me. This help was a lucky thing because right now, as things are going ... (Elena, 29, hotel-restaurant).

The majority of the women are self-employed and own the business. Others have their business in their husband's or son's name, but are in charge of the work. Half of them have employees; these are normally the larger businesses and normally there is some type of family connection to the businesswoman.

The day to day: Work-life balance

All of the women talk about long work days, which include paid work and taking on the majority of the household and family responsibilities. When asked about the number of hours worked, their answers are very similar:

All of them! I work all day ... A good question would be "what hours do you not

work?" When you get up in the morning, you start the cycle; now I do this, now I do that, now I make a sandwich, now a traveller arrives ... it's a constant cycle! (Elena, 29, hotel-restaurant).

Women without children or those with businesses that allow them to hire domestic help dedicate the most time to their venture and have greater ambitions for their work. The possibility to outsource domestic work liberates them from a task they are not interested in and makes them more tolerant of their husband's lack of involvement in the family chores. Also, it reveals how class may intersect with gender to open up opportunities for resistance and even change: "My husband pitches in when there is no other remedy, you know? He will not stay without food, but he will not make the bed" (Esther, 62, wine cellar).

Nonetheless, when there are important family duties, the women tend to put family first, even if they have help:

There are times when you have to sacrifice one thing or another ... and then there comes a time when you cannot put work above family A single person or an older couple is different, but a younger woman [with a partner and children] cannot set aside the family because of work (Clàudia, 61, restaurant).

None of the women have much time off. If they do not work, they do not earn anything, so most of them do not take holidays or they take a little time in the off-season for tourism. Some women mention taking advantage of free time to rest, read, exercise or go to the cinema, but most of them consider their free time the moment to do housework, a very important indicator of their concept of work: "Tuesday and Saturday afternoons are the days I am freer. ... I keep it all to do these days: sewing, cleaning..." (Carme, 51, grocery store).

These women also pay attention to the work-life balance. Despite having a partner, it is the woman who runs the household and does most of the housework and family care. All participants agree that gender roles and relations have changed and that husbands help more in reproductive tasks. However, many women point to these advances within a strong patriarchal discourse:

This has been [evolving] over the years. When we got married he showered and left his clothes on the floor and left. Now he helps me set and clear the table, or, if we are dining, he gets up to find something.... But in a way that he does not impose on me, and this is already a very good way to help (Alba, 54, rural house).

Conciliation implies alternating between the two jobs, accepting that their business is negatively affected by family caretaking and that the family is not cared for to the standard expected of them. The women know that they live in a social context in which a traditional version of femininity is still required to obtain moral worth and

respect. They are conscious of the local community narratives and how they can gain or lose respect because of them. Despite the transitory nature of the rural community, they are aware of the ongoing patriarchal social control and how a woman is supposed to behave:

Here in the village you cannot go anywhere. I go to the bar, but there are women who don't want to go because there are men there or because they look at them ... (Maria, 45, rural house).

The biggest problem is if you are female and young. They do not respect you so much (Elena, 29, hotel-restaurant).

In the context of the symbolic dimension of gender, the women see self-employment as offering them the possibility to do double work. This means a change in the understanding of their "moral obligations" within the home (Camarero et al., 2005). The interviews reveal that some women have lowered their demands on themselves concerning cleaning or cooking tasks, whether by spending less time on them or contracting outside help:

I don't like them at all [domestic tasks].... We could say that between cleaning, making beds, cooking ... it's about four hours a day. I could spend more time, but ... as one of my university professors said: dust and I have signed a peace agreement (Cèlia, 64, wax workshop).

However, while the moral discourse that is connected to the image of "a good woman" as the impeccable housekeeper is losing ground, there is no change in the discourse about caring for the family, whether this is children, someone with a disability or the elderly. Many women have their parents or in-laws very close to home, and taking care of them is considered part of their ordinary activities as women, especially when old relatives need medical or domestic assistance. Some of the women interviewed were reticent to leave this work to public institutions or in the hands of someone outside the family, because they still consider it a female responsibility, intrinsic to their gender:

I find it very sad [to take older people to long-term care centers].... I have had a life that, fortunately, I could combine with caring for older family members and everything else took second place. But I also understand the person who has to go off to work and has a set work schedule. ... But still! I find it a little... If it's possible to die at home, with the family, that is best. Are the care centers necessary? Obviously. Everybody should do what works best for them, but I think it's very sad, especially if their children are in good shape [financially, physically, etc.] (Alba, 54, rural house).

We would note here that, despite the high degree of population aging in the area, there are only 28 places available in public residences for the elderly, 61 places in day centers and no centers to care for people with a disability.⁸ Only 6 of the 12 municipalities have a childcare facility. These data reveal the gaps in the welfare system, without justifying in any way the responsibility those women must assume, but which in practice leaves them to do this work. Even so, the intensity of this double duty varies by a woman's social class and the stage in her life cycle.

The appraisalment

I have brought a lot of money into the area, through my work. The people who work for me earn money and this benefits the whole county. And what it has done for me, how much I love it, that's enough for me. I get home from Barcelona and see these mountains and think that I have enough for me (Teresa, 49, textile workshop).

The businesswomen of Terra Alta have achieved greater economic independence, greater visibility within the family economy, improved self-esteem and a broader network of relationships. The available rural tourism options has meant an increase in jobs in isolated municipalities with minimal job offerings. At the same time, this economic regeneration has slowed rural exodus and helped to maintain minimum local services that were beginning to suffer. The first phase of rural tourism, with opportunities based only on lodging, has been surpassed by a second one in which alternative activities involve additional women: routes of art and history, activities that imply interaction with nature (walking, mountain biking), farm experiences with petting enclosures and children's corners, restaurants serving distinctive local food, workshops on ecosustainability or enological tourism. This fits well with the idea by which the consumption of the countryside is an embodied practice that employs different senses of the body, including sight, sound and taste (Woods, 2011). Fully embodied rural consumption requires the body to be placed in the rural environment; to move, touch and feel the rural landscape. Women offer tourists different ways to seek connection with an imagined idea of the rural through their bodies:

I wanted to do something different. I wanted quality, image and care for nature. I wanted to make a great wine with the added value that was organic (Esther, 62, wine cellar).

In Girona [city], people have too much work to talk (Cristina, 44, rural tourist establishment).

I go to the orchard, pick vegetables and explain to them [the tourists] that they have been freshly picked from the land.... [This] is what they like best (Maria, 45, rural house).

All the same, the social surroundings and sometimes the women themselves still consider their work as complementing the primary source of income (which comes from men's work). In the case of rural tourism, this perception comes from the types of activities they are involved in (very similar to those of domestic and family-related activities). Their initiative is seen less as an original entrepreneurial idea than as the result of other family strategies, such as renovating a property or increasing an estate, or of smaller earnings, which are still conditioned by the seasonal nature of the activity. In this sense, it is also very normal for it to be combined with other activities:

In the morning I get up, do a few things, and then I work on the accounting I mean, I also keep the books for my husband, you know? He is a mason and I do his accounting. I think I multi-task to the max! In mid-morning I go to the fields to check on things there, or I clean if there's cleaning to be done. Everyone knows that's women's work. ... I'm busy all day and depending on what's to be done I do one thing or another (Maria, 45, rural house).

Setting aside this idea of "complementary" work requires, first of all, economic success. In the case of rural tourism, better regulation of the sector is anticipated that would permit business expansion with new services and larger invoices. Only then can we determine whether women's work is seen as a complementary activity or as important entrepreneurial activity that can turn around the household economy. Secondly, the notion of complementarity appears to be related to a work-family balance that is considered the woman's responsibility. The prestige of woman-owned businesses would probably rise if the distribution of the work of reproduction also affected men, so that this equal task sharing could put both genders in similar conditions with respect to paid work.

Most of the women know that being female in a rural county such as Terra Alta puts them at a disadvantage for opportunities in the working world. Some of them consider that their gender has determined their success:

The family [responded] very well [when I took over the wine cellar]! The rest of the village, not as well People said: "This is not going to go well." ... They thought that a woman with three children was just fine staying at home. When I decided to run the business, the people in the village said: "She won't last a week."... But sometimes this just gives a woman more desire to move forward! (Núria, 56, wine cellar).

It is evident that the younger generation, with a better education and greater

professional ambitions, has to decide to leave and look for work or create their own business if they want to remain. The feminine adaptation to this situation is a strategy that stimulates the local economy by creating new businesses that generate jobs and, at the same time, lets them apply their education and training:

With respect to tourism I see it as a good thing.... There is good variety and more people keep coming and this feeds a lot of us who live here! The problem is with the young people who go elsewhere for their studies and, of course, if they return, they want to work at something related to what they studied ... and of course there aren't enough jobs for all of them in their fields of study. Most of them stay in Barcelona [to work] and only come back to the village on weekends or for their holidays.... But I also think that all of us, together, should contribute more creatively. If you have training in something and you want to use it, create something for yourself that lets you earn a living... (Clara, 36, tourist agency)

However, not all young women feel the same; there are also women who stay at home without other work and get along. Nonetheless, there is a general perception that those who go away to study do not return.

Final considerations

This research has attempted to show the role played by women in specific contexts. It has shown the often forgotten but important contribution of women to the rural economy in a Catalan county. Women are the ones who initiate new activities as entrepreneurs, generating jobs and stimulating the economic and social dynamism of the area. The urban attraction toward a rural lifestyle and the improvement of the material conditions of life in rural areas are basic conditions for women to start businesses. But such conditions are not sufficient to carry on. Thanks to their social capital, women have been able to create a new rural identity based on their professional status and mobility. It is this new identity as women in a rural area that strengthens their attachment to place. These self-employed women constitute a new element in the traditional local division of labor, and this situation does not seem to be reversed if they are able to develop their life project, something that is of great importance to ensure the social sustainability of rural areas. Women start businesses they feel capable of handling and that have institutional support because of their potential value to develop the area. These businesses are also a source of jobs for other women in the area, although not for the best educated group of women, who are usually the younger generation.

Businesswomen still do double work. The combination of two or more tasks, in production and reproduction, imposes an objective ceiling on the evolution of their

business activity, which cannot exceed the limits that would threaten their commitment to family matters, demonstrating the importance of gender identity in their everyday life. Therefore, they have to develop innovative strategies to combine their various areas of work.

This double duty does not appear to be a personal choice, but rather it rests upon their acceptance of a double activity (productive and reproductive) and is expressed in the society's collective imagination: the man is no longer the sole head of the family, but this new status does not seem to have brought him similar double work. Women assume a role that is socially imposed and deeply rooted. They feel the charge as a moral obligation, like an altruism imposed by a system of coerced socialization that is biased in favor of being male and against being female. In our conversations with the businesswomen, we could not really determine who fit this role and who did not, but in any case this is important because it influences the behaviors, values and expectations of both women and men and is incorporated within gender identity. Domestic and family responsibilities, the activities and interests of other members of the family and the community all influence the practical and ideological contexts of "women's work." Therefore, rural cultural constructs that underline the importance of family and community life play a key role in women's opportunities and experiences.

The strong family focus and the patriarchal community values outline a social pressure that is difficult for adult generations to overcome. This explains, in part, the "accommodating" tendencies of some women who "decide" not to work outside the home, the work in the underground economy and probably the persistent perception of the complementarity of the work done by women entrepreneurs in the county. In this sense, women approach changed economic status in a way that attempts to protect men's self-esteem and well-being and does not alter too much the existing gender structures of the rural community, at least so far.

In this sense, there was sometimes the impression that the success of these rural initiatives is partly because they do not subvert women's reproductive role and this is the role that legitimates their participation in the business world. This is very clear among the oldest of the women and is also manifested in the youngest:

And how did your partner react [to starting the business]?

Well, at first, he wasn't very pleased... (Elena, 29, hotel-restaurant)

How did those around you react when you decided to start the business?

Well, I am very discreet about how I run the business ... and I suppose that's why people don't really see it as a business. Actually, I call it my "little business." When I started it, I did it in combination with other things, so people saw it as

normal. Then, since I didn't do it full-time until it was successful, nobody was surprised. We could say that they gradually became accustomed to it (Clara, 36, tourist agency).

The women appreciate the "flexibility" they have to manage their own time for double activities. This advantage, paradoxically, is a detriment to their businesses. The discriminatory obligations of reproduction constitute a major part of the "glass ceiling" described by these pioneers when they discuss the future of their business:

If you want your work to be profitable, you have to invest and aspire to growth, but you also have to know how to stop because everyone has their limitations and other things to do, in addition to your work (Clara, 36, tourist agency).

Despite all this, women have opened a path to development of the place they love, to personal empowerment and to a greater attachment to place closely linked to their professional activity. They have done it to earn a living, and it is a result of their education, the production and social transformations of the territory and improved legitimacy of the female presence in public life. Women have structural possibilities to start a business (education, policies and funds oriented to women) that collide with both the symbolic gender dimension at the local level (particular forms of gender roles and relations, sexual division of labor) and their individual gender dimension (their own expectations). This makes women very aware of their role in time and place, and they manage this information with the ability to overcome potential conflicts within the family, the enterprise and the community. The trajectories of the women we interviewed would be difficult to imagine without their personal creativity and the social acceptance they have generated. As one interviewee pointed out, "Businesses? We never used to have any!"

Notes

- 1 The county received the Denomination of Origin Terra Alta in 1982.
- 2 According to IDESCAT (2007), gross household income per inhabitant is 15,680 Euros for Terra Alta, compared to 14,060 Euros for all of Catalunya.
- 3 In rural Catalan areas overall, the rate is 40%; in Catalunya, 51.2%; Spain, 46%; and the European Union, 49% (Torns et al., 2007).
- 4 There is no official data on the number of women entrepreneurs in Terra Alta, reflecting a continued gender bias in official statistics.

- 5 This is an instrument for implementing the new rural development paradigm, adopted as the model for the European Union rural development policy by the European Conference on Rural Development in Cork, Ireland, in 1996. The program aims to stimulate innovative approaches to rural development at the local level. Local partnerships comprise local government, businesses and community groups.
- 6 The first rural tourist establishment in Terra Alta was started in 1993. By 2009, there were 21 establishments with 188 beds (1% and 1.2%, respectively, of the total for Catalunya; IDESCAT, 2009). The growth of rural tourism in Terra Alta and Catalunya in general occurred during the first decade of the twenty-first century. A 2002 tourism law for Catalunya enhanced the provision of certain services to tourist hosts, which broadened the possibilities of business.
- 7 The fundamental idea of the LEADER plans, which was to help rural areas with serious problems, such as population aging, rural exodus or the loss of jobs, was a perfect fit for Terra Alta at the time. The first LEADER plan (1989–1993) was directed toward strengthening rural tourism, slowing the continuous population loss in the county and the analysis of local environmental resources. The next two rounds (1994–1999 and 2000–2006) strengthened support for creating and improving the quality of agrarian businesses and small and medium enterprises. Moreover, the last round, 11 years after the first initiative, refined the objective and invested in the most marginal groups: youth and women (García Rodríguez et al., 2005).
- 8 In 2008 there were 494 people legally considered disabled in the county.

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