

ENVIRONMENTAL CAPITAL AND WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

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Abstract: Developing an integrated place-based approach is necessary in order to generate sustainable policies in mountain and peripheral areas with high natural values. The High Catalan Pyrenees in Catalonia is one of these remote areas with high natural values, currently facing severe sustainability challenges. The high natural values, also called environmental capital, represent the main source of assets in a development rationale. In the urban-rural dynamics arena, “naturbanization” is one of the processes that express the profound transformation of rural society in these areas. Understood as the increasing attraction of new residents to Protected Natural Areas (PNA), naturbanization generates new development opportunities together with social renewal. Naturbanization also increases pressure on land use and raises divisions among the wide range of land users. Previous studies have identified two main paths in the area. On the one hand, ski resorts associated with new second homes are at the core of what can be called the “tourism and building” model. On the other hand, handicraft products represent the key in innovative development and social initiatives. Both models are focused on visitors but yield different impacts over the land and on the community. Both land and community use environmental assets and they are located in or close to PNA. The tourism and building model has brought about an important demographic recovery and an increase in per capita income in the area. However, this model has found its limits when promoted solely as a model of growth in the eco-development framework. In contrast, entrepreneurial activities with added value show greater consistency with sustainable principles. Moreover, women’s participation in entrepreneurial projects shows an increasing leadership role that can be associated with greater gender equality. New research explores the extent of the innovative initiatives related to natural assets and highlights the importance of developing an integrated approach in order to generate sustainable policies.

Keywords: Catalan Pyrenees, comparative advantage theory, eco-development, entrepreneurship, gender, governance, naturbanization, natural protected areas, sustainable development, value-added activities

1. INTRODUCTION

In the local rural development arena, gender policies constitute one of the main overlooked aspects despite the fact that women’s role in rural areas has been thoroughly evaluated being as crucial in farm diversification and social cohesion in rural communities (Bock, 2015). Indeed, gender studies represent an increasingly relevant part of social sciences, contributing to new perspectives and opening up concepts which define the dynamic of gender inequality (André, 2013). However, it is less common to treat gender as a factor in an integrated

analysis and multi-approach framework (Bock, 2015).

This article is developed along these lines whereby we lay out the coherence and contradictions in the interplay between environmental capital, as the main source of assets of the study region, and the urban-rural dynamics, as a driver of change in rural areas. We relate both these interactions to their potential for employment creation, whilst integrating a gender perspective into the whole approach. With these premises, we analyse the importance of environmental capital and women’s participation in local rural development and rural governance. These

two influences on the development of sustainable territorial strategies at the regional level are illustrated through the example of the High Catalan Pyrenees (HCP) region (Catalonia, Spain).

In many cases, environmental values constitute the most valuable assets of remote mountain areas and should play a central role in sustainable local development strategies. However, significant changes have to be promoted in terms of implementation of policies to achieve an integrated approach to overcome traditional sectorialism in regional rural development policies. Indeed, the ecological challenge that communities face in the early twenty-first century requires the understanding of the ongoing processes of global changes with renewed approaches and new tools (Tello, 2006).

The quality of the environmental capital of the case study region is reflected well in the fact that nearly half (46.6%) of the HCP area (5 775.6 hectares) is protected land. This includes three Protected Natural Areas (PNA) – the National Park of Aigüestortes i Sant Maurici, the High Pyrenees Natural Park, and the Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park – besides other areas with minor protection land regulations. The importance of environmental capital has been crucial in retaining and attracting people, which is one of the main challenges that the region faces. Indeed, between 1981 and 2011, the population variation rate in the municipalities included in PNA was 34.26%, as compared to 16.65% in the outer PNA.

Immigration in the HCP reversed the recessionary demographic trends, which had begun in the mid-twentieth century and continued up until 1989 when the region registered a total growth of 1% and a 3% migration increase. Between 1989 and 2009, the highest annual growth was registered in 2008, with a total growth of 30%, along with a 30% rise in migration. However, the 2008 financial crisis caused the unemployment rate to rise to 17% in 2014 (20% in Catalonia). Unemployment is mainly concentrated in services and construction, as they are both the most important sectors and also those most affected by the recession. The Gross Value Added (GVA) rate in the HCP in 2012 is distributed as follows: 6% from agriculture (2% in Catalonia); 9% from industry (21% in Catalonia); 16% from the building sector (8% in Catalonia) and 69% from services (69% in Catalonia). The accommodation subsector, included in services, represents 19% GVA (8% in Catalonia). Despite the agricultural sector involving little direct employment, it still plays a particularly strategic role in the area where there is a dairy cluster articulated around two cooperatives: one of which produces quality,

Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) cheese and butter (Cadí Cooperative), and the other provides services and production factors such as animal feed (Pirenaica Cooperative). Most of the milk farmers in the area are cooperative members. This cluster operates in a large area of the region, which includes some bordering France. Its success is due to three main factors of production: first, the high technology applied at both the processing dairy plant and farms; second, the redistribution of the benefits of the dairy cooperative among associated farmers; and third, the high specialization in genetic control and in animal nutrition for dairy cattle with innovative feeding management, just-in-time delivery service of processed fodder from the associated farms (Tulla et al., 2009). This organizational model provides lower opportunity cost that is the basis of the comparative advantage with respect to a conventional market model, namely, big companies (Tulla et al., 2009). Therefore, the pricing system of this local milk production model has an important economic return for the farmers. For the whole 1985-2008 period, the milk price paid to the farmers who were members of the Cooperative was 40% above the average price in Spain and 10% above the average in France. In addition, production factors for the farms, which are mainly related to feed for dairy cattle, are on average 25% less than those in Spain. In contrast, in France the price of feed is 10% lower than the Pirenaica Cooperative price. This cost reduction, in addition to better prices, produces profits to the farmers and gives a “relative comparative advantage” to farms and also to the agro-industry cooperative which sells these quality products (50% of total production is exported to other countries) (Tulla, 1991; Tulla et al., 2009). However, despite receiving agricultural subsidies, farming activity is decreasing. In contrast, small projects related to local food products seem to be increasing. This paper aims to explore their consistency and role in respect to sustainable local development.

2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The need to distinguish between core and peripheral rural areas has been emphasized (Paniagua, 2002a) owing to the necessity to increase the scientific precision of studies on counterurbanization and the new social classes, with the purpose of studying urban-rural migrants in a purely rural context (Paniagua, 2008). In this sense, the attractiveness of protected natural areas adds the pull factor of rural areas with specific natural values to the traditional vision of counterurbanization as a process of urban deconcentration (Prados, 2009).

Naturbanization is identified as a modality of counterurbanization that is taking place in or around PNA and consists of new residential settlements motivated by the attraction of the environmental values (Prados, 2009; Pallarès-Blanch, 2009; Tulla et al., 2009; Pallarès-Blanch et al., 2014). Preliminary research based in Great Britain, the Netherlands and Spain (Elbersen, 2001; Elbersen, 2005) concludes that the process has less presence in Spain than in northern Europe. However, the process shows an increasing trend that is occurring in coastal areas like Doñana National Park in Spain, in those PNA close to large metropolitan areas (e.g., Kampinoski National Park in Poland), in remote mountain areas such as Portugal's Peneda-Gêres National Park (Prados, 2009) or Spain's Sierra Nevada National Park (Prados, 2009) and in the Catalan Pyrenees (Pallarès-Blanch, 2009; Tulla et al., 2009; Pallarès-Blanch et al., 2014).

It is in this new rural context – marked by a redefinition of rural areas on the stage of the global economy, the hypermobility of the population and the multifunctionality of agriculture – that immigration takes on an essential importance, no longer as a consequence of the deconcentration of cities (Champion, 1989; Champion & Hugo, 2004) but as an emerging force in rural development (Bosworth, 2010). One of the benefits that immigration brings to rural areas is an increase in entrepreneurship (Baumgartner et al., 2013) and one aspect of this is the creation of eco-economic strategies as an alternative to the global agenda of competition (Horlings & Marsden, 2014; Wilson, 2012). One part of this entrepreneurial immigration is linked to rural tourism (Haugen & Vik, 2008; Lordkipanidze et al., 2005) or to new services related to nature conservation (Andersson et al., 2009): these are known as green entrepreneurs (Schaper, 2005) or eco-entrepreneurs (Volery, 2002). Among this entrepreneurial immigrant population we need to include the returning young people, men and women, who had originally stayed in the city after going to study at university. One common factor within this entrepreneurial immigration is the desire to live in better quality surroundings, which is seen as an opportunity to create satisfying lifestyles and work (Herslund & Tanvig, 2012). The newcomers contribute to the connection between qualified young people and the area and, in some cases, include business innovation and empowerment for women (Bock, 2006; Copus et al., 2006; Stockdale, 2006; McIntosh et al., 2008; Herslund, 2012; Herslund & Tanvig, 2012).

Without a doubt, these new settlements can stimulate rural multifunctionality, the creation of

new jobs, and social cohesion (Shucksmith et al., 2009; Norris et al., 2010; Gosnell & Abrams, 2011; Morris & Kirwan, 2011). Nonetheless, the same factors that can boost rural development in these areas can also lead to unintended consequences, such as an increase in the built surface area, resource pressure and decline, and changing land use that, in turn, can degenerate the landscape (Ristic et al., 2011) or, in some cases, reconfigure the original urban morphology of the affected towns as new construction predominates over the old and even the introduction of styles from other mountain regions (Pallarès-Blanch et al., 2014). In these cases, the basic natural element of the territory is notably diminished as the artificiality of the space increases (Norris et al., 2010). As a consequence, the landscape loses symbolic value as a natural and traditional space (Vaccaro & Beltran, 2007). Conflicts in land use also reflect alterations in the social cohesion of the communities affected by the naturbanization process, which, again, can bring about positive effects such as human capital enhancement but can also propel acculturation processes (Vaccaro & Beltran, 2007). Consequently, naturbanization must be carefully considered, because it is both the result of valuing the natural environment and landscape, and an exponent of contemporary rural repopulation (Pallarès-Blanch et al., 2014).

Indeed, the extraordinary social impact of environmental questions, especially with respect to the environmental preservation of natural and semi-natural spaces, has led to new pressures over these territories. A number of factors are interplaying in this restructuring process: (a) The investments in public services in natural rural areas (Ventura et al., 2010); (b) The increase in both the standard of living and purchasing power (Bosworth, 2010), which has stimulated the tourist supply in rural natural areas (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011); (c) The rural development policies promoting the multifunctionality of rural areas (Ventura et al., 2010); (d) The urban-rural immigration phenomenon (Paniagua, 2002b; Paniagua, 2008; Shucksmith et al., 2009; Pallarès-Blanch et al., 2014); (e) The improved representation of rural areas, which facilitates the settlement and integration of urban newcomers into life in rural communities (Halfacree, 2012); (f) The increasing awareness of preserving the environment of rural natural areas related to the ethics of space (Ianoş et al., 2010); and finally, (g) The effects of a model of development (now in recession) highly based on speculation in real estate and the housing bubble that in natural rural areas has been oriented to an expansion in second homes with

noticeable effects (Norris et al., 2010). These are common trends affecting most European mountain areas to a greater or lesser degree. However, the HCP region presents a specific particularity in the sense that the capitalist model of development was not completely introduced until the second half of the twentieth century (Tulla, 1991).

In the HCP region, the self-sufficiency system has been replaced in only a century by a system characterized by the integration of these highlands into wider and more dynamic territorial, economic and political spaces which nowadays interplay at a global level (Tulla, 1982; Vaccaro & Beltran, 2007; Pallarès-Blanch, 2009). Substituting one system with another has changed the socio-economic function and consequently also land use and the dynamics of the natural vegetation and landscape. This profound turnaround is a common trend among remote rural areas, which currently face an important spatial duality.

On the one hand, there are severely depopulated areas as a consequence of a decrease in farming, particularly in high altitude areas resulting in abandonment of fields, diminution of useful soil, decrease in herbaceous cover and an increase in forests (Tulla et al., 2009; Masný & Zaušková, 2014). The process of land abandonment increases landscape homogeneity and its persistence favours the development of a simplified mosaic, dominated by contiguous forest patches. This landscape homogenization means a reduction of open habitats (crops, grasslands, and scrubland) and an increased risk of wildfires due to a reduction in fragmentation (Lasanta-Martínez et al., 2005). Certainly, the maintenance of biological diversity in cultural landscapes depends on the spatial heterogeneity created by natural forces and human actions (Lasanta-Martínez et al., 2005).

On the other hand, land use intensification concentrates in the lower of the valleys, which strengthens the settlement network, although it also provokes a greater consumption of useful soil. However, intensive land use for tourist activities is also a territorial process identified in the upper valleys as a common trend in many rural natural areas most devoted to tourist activities and particularly those with ski resorts (Ristic et al., 2011). As a consequence of these concomitant elements interplaying, most European mountain areas evolve in three different directions, often simultaneously within the same region (Schuler et al., 2004): (a) becoming museum spaces aimed at environmental protection and recreational functions; (b) the over exploitation of resources; or (c) become abandoned and neglected areas.

Among the factors that explain these fragmented results in mountain areas, the nature of the implementation of rural policy, still retaining a tight focus on sectorial visions of rural spaces, is highlighted (Dax, 2015). Political discussion on rural development (including both academics and politicians) has expanded the horizons, covering a range of new concepts and approaches, such as: differentiation and the dynamics of rural areas; territorial capital and the urban-rural interaction; balanced regional development; multi-level governance; coherent policy; governance issues; the role of innovation and creativity; neo-endogenous development, and the relational approach which emphasizes networking and cooperation (Emery et al., 2006; Dax, 2015). However, critics have pointed out that these discourses are very advanced within the political and academic arenas but, in many cases, have little impact on policy implementation, which some believe leads to a loss of opportunities and underuse of resources (Domínguez Garcia et al., 2012; Dax, 2015). Along the same lines, it has also been shown that there is a big gap between the declared intentions and the eventual action, and that there is an even wider gap between intentions and effects (Ianoş et al., 2010). In this context, new approaches provide greater clarity on the dynamic, which emphasizes that the application of transdisciplinarity is just in its initial stages in the area of policy implementation.

Environmental studies are probably one of the scholarly disciplines that have most contributed to sustainable development, from the perspective of augmenting our knowledge (Ianos et al., 2009). However, the social sciences perspective is less common in the field of sustainable development approaches, particularly when environmental issues are at the centre of the debate. Among the emerging approaches, the eco-economy path is one that most presents some reasonable opportunities for sustainable local rural development, particularly in regions with high environmental values. The rural and regional eco-development can be defined as “the effective social management and reproduction of ecological resources (combinations of natural, social, economic and territorial capital) in ways designed to mesh with and enhance the local and regional eco-system rather than disrupting and destroying it” (Horlings & Marsden, 2014).

The key parameter in these transition processes is the change in the relations between the web domains. In many rural areas, particularly those close to natural or semi-natural spaces, agriculture and livestock production are progressively being transformed into an integrated system in which

added value is the key to gaining economic benefits, including the preparation of high-quality, often organic, foods and development of proximity networks of consumption as well as production (Morris & Kirwan, 2011). These are, in many cases, examples of innovative production forms of competitiveness that act as a pathway of development that, although they still have a weak position in the global market, they generate new horizontal and vertical linkages that lead to new production – consumption chains and networks as a counterforce and as a transition model of development towards greater sustainability (Horlings & Marsden, 2014).

Despite its age, the theory of Comparative Advantage (CA) is still a useful instrument to place local and regional potentialities in a wider context. This classical economics model posits that if countries specialize in producing goods where they have a lower opportunity cost there will be an increase in economic welfare (Tulla et al., 2009). This is particularly relevant when taking into account the major challenges and also opportunities that currently face remote areas, because of their peripherality. Indeed, urban-rural flows are increasing in the current post-productive capitalist regime and in the hypermobility era (European Environment Agency, 2006; Vaccaro & Beltran, 2007). From our point of view it is extremely relevant to see consistency between the eco-economy approach and the gender and development approach, particularly when this is focused on women's entrepreneurship.

Women's entrepreneurship is increasing worldwide, often as a solution to the lack of employment, especially in the peripheral areas (Ahl, 2006; Copus et al., 2006; Brush et al., 2009; Anthopoulou, 2010; European Commission, 2010). The reviewed literature refers to the smaller size of the businesses initiated by women, as compared to men. Consequently, the generated earnings are lower than men's businesses. Nevertheless, women's economic activity has benefits regarding work-life balance (Copus et al., 2006). Both as a solution to the lack of employment and in the process of restructuring in rural areas, women play a central role in the new economic activities, particularly those related with food crafts, art and crafts, and health services, but they often struggle with traditional ideas of male entrepreneurship and have difficulty being considered entrepreneurs.

In this respect, it is claimed that it is necessary to study entrepreneurship with an approach not only based on economic growth as the main goal but as a decentralized approach of productive life, thus

incorporating the caring aspect in people's lives (Ahl, 2006; Brush et al., 2009). In this frame, we analyse women's entrepreneurship in the HCP region's eco-development domain as an innovation process on three levels: economically; environmentally; and socially – the latter because women are key actors in the eco-economy and this reveals greater social inclusion and equity. In addition, the focus on women's new entrepreneurship in eco-development activities as a path towards sustainable rural development strategies can boost the culture of respect for the environment. It can also furnish more cautious attitudes in the rural development arena towards the environment including policy-makers, stakeholders, professionals on local rural development and citizens (Ianos et al., 2009; Ianoş et al., 2010).

3. METHODS AND SOURCES

The main sources of information used in this study are: (a) academic literature based on a multi-approach analysis to identify the factors enhancing sustainable local development, (b) official data about financial subsidies supporting self-employment, and (c) questionnaires completed by entrepreneurs.

The analytical framework and the literature include naturbanization studies and gender and development studies focused on women's entrepreneurship and comparative advantage theory (Tulla et al., 2009).

We have adopted the definition of sustainable development provided by the European Commission, but rather than develop an operational definition of this concept, we have selected the conceptual framework supplied by the following sources: (a) Nechodom (2005) on the need to engage institutions and environmental management agencies in defining the concept; (b) Tolón & Lastra (2009) on "new-endogenous development" that takes advantage of the endogenous potential for the development of social capital and of local participatory democracy to establish processes of sustainable rural development; and (c) the Spanish law concerning sustainable development in rural areas, which states that all rural policy must seek better territorial integration of rural zones, facilitating a complementary relationship between rural and urban areas.

In addition to the literature, we used empirical data, both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data is obtained from three main databases used as proxy indicators of women's entrepreneurship since the lack of gender-segregated data is still a handicap that gender studies face (Bock, 2006; Bock, 2015;

Herslund, 2012; Herslund & Tanvig; 2012).

First, official data on the beneficiaries of financial subsidies for the self-employment programme is used to evaluate women's share in new entrepreneurship. Data is gathered in two periods (2002-2006 and 2007-2011) and five territories according to their degree of rurality (defined by population density): Rural Counties (<100 inh./sq. km); Intermediate Counties (101 to 300 inh./sq. km); Urban Counties (> 301 inh./sq. km); the HCP region; and total Catalonia.

Second, there are two other databases complementing this section: (a) the crafts index from Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park created by CEDRICAT Foundation in 2013; and (b) the database owned by the "SOM-Pirineu" programme aimed at entrepreneurship promotion and facilitated by the leading institution, Institute for Promotion and Development of HCP (IDAPA).

Third, we use 53 questionnaires completed by entrepreneurs (women and men) engaged in eco-development activities. The questionnaires were focused on detecting: a) the factors which motivated the creation of the enterprise; b) the use of local materials, the types of products, types of production, and the linkages with the region's natural values specifically with natural parks' assets (points of sale location, natural parks branding included in the labelling, direct selling, and tasting and training services and workshops); c) their personal and professional background, education, and specific training; d) institutional support; and e) improvements to their professional and personal life brought about by the enterprise.

Finally, we reach a more comprehensive qualitative approach with 12 in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs. The interviews addressed the same topics as the questionnaires but explored them in greater detail. All in all, it is about creating a sophisticated methodological architecture based on diverse approaches in order to obtain the maximum analytical depth (Fielding, 2008). The different methods and approaches are mutually supportive and give rise to new perspectives and understanding, but we need multifaceted information in order to achieve them, something which is especially important in studies that are carried out from a gender perspective (Olesen, 2011; Forsberg & Stenbacka, 2013).

4. RESULTS

The Pyrenees mountain range is 450 km long and 150 km wide, located along the border between Andorra, France and Spain, and it can be considered

one the most important natural range in south-western Europe.

4.1. Main Characteristics of the HCP

The High Catalan Pyrenees (Fig. 1) is one of the eight planning administrative regions in Catalonia. With an area of 5 777 sq. km and 74 883 inhabitants (2014), the HCP represents 18% of Catalonia and only 1% of the population, providing €2.116 billion of GNP in 2010. The region has the lowest population density in Catalonia, 13 inh./sq. km, in contrast to the average of 235 inh./sq. km for the whole of Catalonia.

Looking at these territorial indicators, together with the long distances to the main urban centres and the lack of fast communications (more than 90 minutes to reach a major road), the HCP region can be considered a remote area with respect to the urban system of Catalonia, Spain, and France. During the twentieth century, the area deeply modified the socio-economic structure from a subsistence economy to a service sector. In 2012, 73% of workers belonged to the service sector, with 58% of employed women, 55% in Catalonia. Only 6% of the workers belonged to the agricultural sector, 15% in 1991. This agricultural decline has been accompanied by a loss in industry, whose share dropped from 18% in 1991 to 7% 2010. The construction industry, now in recession, is the second largest industry offering 12% of employment opportunities in 2012, as compared to 17% in 2001.

4.2. Naturbanization effects in the HCP

Environmental and ecological values have certainly been the main resources, both physical and symbolic, which have enabled the specialization in tourism in the region – based mainly on the creation of ski resorts, starting in the 1960s. However, in the late 1990s and during the 2000s, the region experienced the greatest increase in services, and the tourism and building model of development gained momentum with Spain's construction boom (Pallarès-Blanch et al., 2014). During this period, vast second-home developments have been promoted around these ski areas, which are close to the major region's PNAs. In 2011, second homes represented 41% of total housing. However, the growth rates of second homes slowed down from 51% in 1981-1991 to 31% in 1991-2001 and to 34% in the period of 2001-2011. In contrast, the rate of growth of primary homes increased from 11% in 1981-1991 to 23% in 1991-2001 and to 29% in 2001-2011 (Pallarès-Blanch et al., 2014).

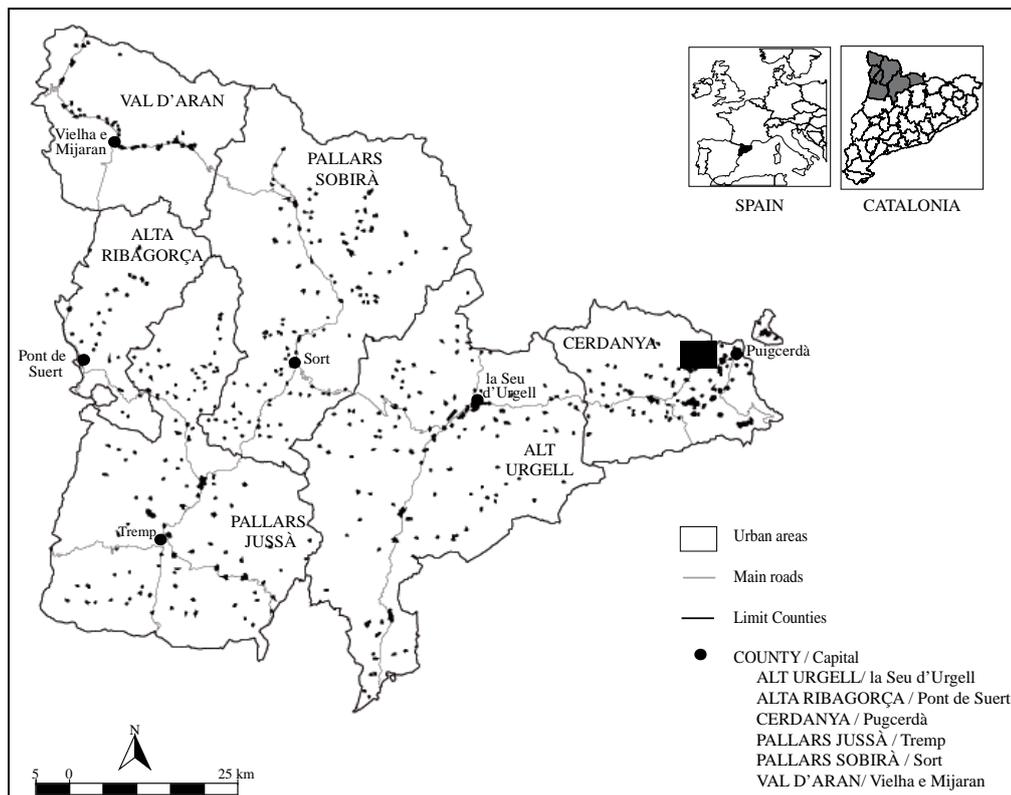


Figure 1: High Catalan Pyrenees Region (HCP): Counties, settlements and main roads

Source: Sustainability and Territory Department. Catalan Government, 2014

Both trends may show; firstly, that the boom in secondary homes has peaked and, secondly, that some of the second-home users have settled as permanent residents. This economic model of development has inverted the regressive dynamic that existed previously and has provided, since the year 2000, higher household incomes per inhabitant than the average for Catalonia: €18 300 and €17 400 respectively in 2010. This model for growth has been accompanied by two distinct migratory tendencies: seasonal residents (Pallarès-Blanch et al., 2014) and immigration from abroad – whose migrants have found employment in the two growth sectors of the last two decades, services and construction (Solé et al., 2012).

However, negative effects are to be found in the impact on the landscape. Aside from the growth in major towns in the area, new urbanization is found next to ski areas and always close to a major PNA. The prevailing orthogonal urban morphology (semi-detached houses) brings into alignment an urban ethos that is unrelated to the traditional village morphology and the pre-existing urban hierarchy. In the absence of an existing urban space, the new townhouses are localized as residential enclaves with no urban configuration. Moreover, in areas where real estate promotion is not developed, small villages continue to be in the process of abandonment, except in areas that have attracted

new permanent residents. These residents are more likely to renovate homes or abandoned buildings (Pallarès-Blanch et al., 2014) and generate new value-added activities, thereby respecting the balance between anthropogenic natural elements and new needs for urban space (Tulla et al., 2009). In turn, this ameliorates the population concentration pattern in the valleys (Fig. 1).

4.3. Women's participation in new entrepreneurship

In Spain, the number of self-employed women on 31 December 2013 was 652 220, representing 33.9% of the total self-employed population, as compared to 34.4% in the EU (Barnard & Blackham, 2015). The proportion was similar in previous years. However, the percentage of self-employed women in relation to the total of female workers has increased from 9.8% in 2011 to 10.2% in 2012. This could be the consequence of the increase of the unemployment rate due to the economic crisis (Barnard & Blackham, 2015). The growing importance of self-employment and entrepreneurship among women, particularly in rural peripheral areas has been detected by both scholars and EU commissioners (Copus et al., 2006; Brush et al., 2009; Herslund, 2012; Herslund & Tanvig, 2012). To evaluate women's new entrepreneurship in the HCP we analysed the data on

the recipients of subsidies awarded for the promotion of self-employment – differentiated by sex and their distribution among counties in Catalonia, which were aggregated according to their degree of rurality – in order to create a value on women’s participation in entrepreneurship (Fig. 2). The results indicate that while, in total, Catalan women’s share has dropped between one period (2002-2006) and the second one (2007-2011), women’s share has increased in rural counties and intermediate counties and particularly in the HCP region. This can be understood as a result of the increase in self-employment among men – as a solution to the loss of jobs, which is greater in big cities – whereas the increase of women’s entrepreneurship in the HCP region may show women’s livelihood strategies in the face of lack of job opportunities.

4.4. Women’s new entrepreneurship and the eco-economy

The indicators obtained from the database of the catalogue of handicraft activities in the Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park, along with those from the participants in the programme to promote entrepreneurship, known as SOM-Pirineu, reveal a higher growth rate in women’s participation in the HCP in comparison with the rest of Catalonia and Spain. The results show the possible links between the new women’s entrepreneurship and making the most use of local resources. In both cases, the ratios of women's participation are similar: 37% in

the Artisans of Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park and 38% in the SOM-Pirineu programme, and they are higher than the general self-employment ratio in Spain, 34% (Table 1). The ratios are also close to equality thresholds, like in the Equality Act 2007 (minimum 40% and maximum 60% of each gender in candidatures for political elections). Moreover, these numbers indicate a higher participation of women in new entrepreneurship than in HCP local government (22% are women) and as mayors (8% women in HCP, 14% and 17% in Catalonia and Spain, respectively) (Casellas et al., 2009; Casellas et al., 2013). This fact indicates women’s greater involvement in new entrepreneurship than in the local politics in line with what is asserted in the 2008 EU report on the situation of women in rural areas: “whereas the significant contribution made by women to local and community development is inadequately reflected in their participation in the relevant decision-making processes”. Results from the questionnaires conducted with eco-development entrepreneurs (women and men) showed that: (a) living close to nature is one of the primary motivations; (b) they understand that they have to preserve the highly valuable landscape of the area; (c) their production relies on the use of local raw materials, and some of them elaborate high quality products or organic production and are related to natural resources; and (d) most of the new entrepreneurs are newcomers or returnees who keep tight links with urban networks connected to their employment.

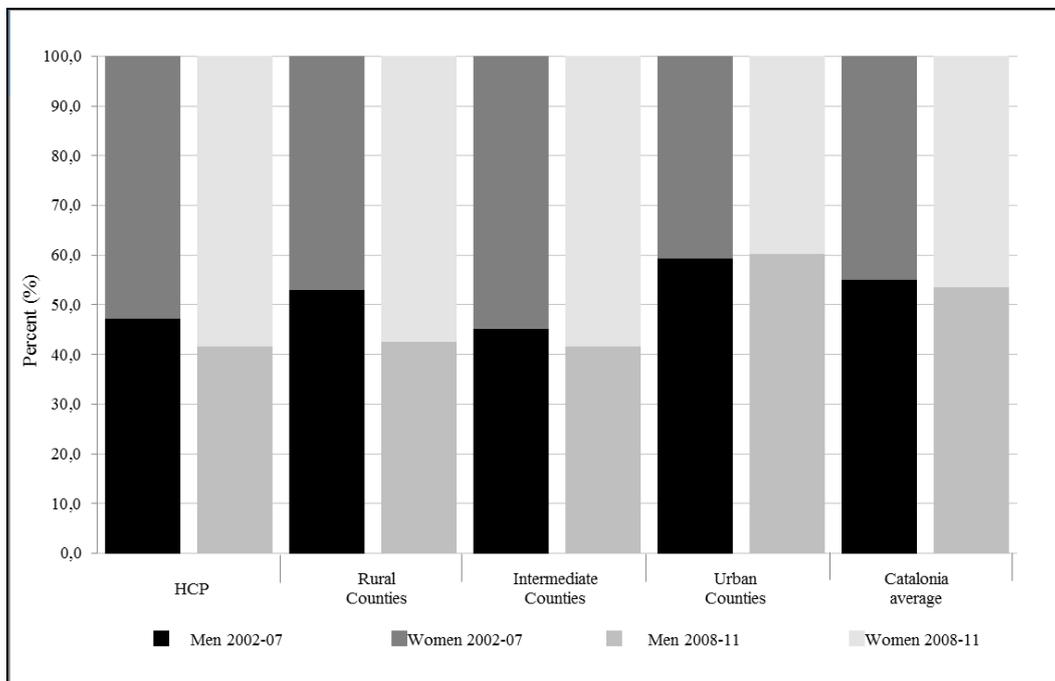


Figure 2. Beneficiaries of self-employment subsidies by sex and Catalan counties aggregated according to the degree of rurality, 2002-2006 and 2007-2011 (%)

Source: Graphics processed with data from the Enterprise and Employment Observatory. Catalan Government, 2014

Table 1. Eco-entrepreneurship projects in HCP, 2013

Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park Crafts Index	W %	W & M
Total Participants	37%	51
Arts & Crafts	36%	3
Production & Elaboration Agric. Prod.	37%	16
SOM-Pirineu Entrepreneurship Programme	W %	W & M
Total Participants	38%	369
Nature-related projects	27%	125
Nature-Ecotourism	29%	8
Nature-Hiking	30%	100
Local products projects	44%	244
Arts & Crafts	77%	68
Agricultural Production & Elaboration	31%	175
Self-employed women	34%	369
Self-employed men	15%	369
Association with companies women	13%	369
Association with companies men	45%	369
Belong to association women	9%	369
Belong to association men	7%	369

W: women; M: men

Source: IDAPA, 2013; CEDRICAT, 2013

With respect to the invisibility of women's socio-economic status and empowerment, a number of situations are detected. This is particularly true in the more traditional firms (traditional food), where women participate in management duties, but less in the public representation like in the SOM-Pirineu programme. This fact reduces women's visibility because despite being involved in entrepreneurial businesses, they are not being counted. This situation is intensified in the sector "Local Products". In contrast, all projects related to women in the nature-based sector are not businesses run by a woman with her spouse, but run by her alone, a fact indicating the gradual initiation of women in this emerging sector. The same pattern applies in most projects related to "Arts & Crafts". There is no specific support for women entrepreneurs, with the exception of women who are victims of gender violence. Despite that, eco-entrepreneurship welcomes women's leadership, in some cases leading to representation in politics (Verge, 2010; Casellas et al., 2013). These are, particularly, the cases of women leading craft workshops, eco-tourist attractions, production processing or selling locally-based products (e.g. small-scale, short-chain supply).

Also, the case study has found examples of women running other new businesses, as self-employed entrepreneurs in sectors aside from crafts, such as environmental education services from micro-enterprises or from museum services, as well

as design studios, publishing services, companies indicating pathways and routes, forestry consultants, or local development. All cases were nested in the community production networks, and women's encouragement had a key role in the community cohesion. Their modes of productions are consistent with the principles of integrated rural development because they are based on using locally sourced raw materials, some of high and PDO status, or organic production and related to using natural resources (Tolón & Lastra, 2009; Herslund, 2012; Herslund & Tanvig, 2012).

5. DISCUSSION

We have used the HCP region as an example of a remote mountainous area in south-western Europe to explain the coherences and contradictions in the interplay between, on the one hand, environmental capital – understood as the primary source of assets of the region being studied – and the influence of urban-rural dynamics and, on the other hand, the employment potentials that these interactions reveal; all elements are analysed from the gender perspective. With these multiple approaches, we could identify some of the factors enhancing sustainable local development in the three dimensions: environmental, economic and social.

Women's share in new entrepreneurship in the HCP indicates a definite growth trend that is above the Catalan average and higher than in other rural counties. Furthermore, the study suggests that there is a positive relationship between PNAs, immigration and new women's entrepreneurship (mainly young women from an urban background who are highly educated). In addition, the principles of environmental sustainability, implicit in the idea of integrated rural development, are considered in employment types that they have undertaken. This is reflected in the artisan methods of production, the local base of raw materials used, and the links with the natural resources and Natural Parks branding. This eco-economy path enhances environmental capital and suggests that there is a comparative advantage in producing locally based goods instead of looking for jobs outside the region or instead of maintaining jobs in the cities that do not provide full satisfaction. These initiatives became life strategies, as it was reported in the interviews with women. In many cases, these strategies can be identified as responses to the perception of the potential of self-employment as a solution to the lack of jobs, along with a strong desire to live in the area. However, according to the explorative statistics through available local databases, we have identified

traditional gender inequalities like the over-representation in some sectors or under-representation in others, known as horizontal gender occupational segregation. But these situations are beginning to change as it is detected in other rural regions in Europe (Copus et al., 2006; Forsberg & Stenbacka, 2013). At the same time, we have identified vertical occupational segregation by gender – which refers to the unequal distribution of genders corresponding to different levels of authority. This has also been detected in other specific studies (Stenbacka & Tillberg Mattsson, 2009).

Women are present in a third of the new eco-economy projects analysed in the HCP. However, women's participation is higher in innovative enterprises (either by type of product or type of service) compared to men. Furthermore, women's share in this new entrepreneurship is higher than in local government, the latter figure traditionally being very small as compared to both Catalan and Spanish contexts. This suggests a possible better inclusion of women in the eco-entrepreneurship sector in comparison with more traditional sectors such as local politics.

Research findings confirm the literature review regarding business initiated by women, which are smaller in size and generate a lower income, as compared to those started by men (Brush et al., 2009). Nevertheless, these women's businesses provide flexibility regarding work-life balance (Copus et al., 2006; Herslund, 2012), as women expressed in the interviews. Ecological economic initiatives, as well as the food and cultural events related to them, are indicative of a growing development model related to local production, with investments and growth rates more tailored to personal needs (Brush et al., 2009; Herslund, 2012). At the same time, these women's life strategies confer them visibility and empowerment to a larger degree than in traditional women's jobs in rural areas, such as conventional agriculture and retail. In many cases, these women's strategies were their path towards participation in local government, which was also shown in previous studies in the area (Casellas et al., 2009; Casellas et al., 2013).

Research developed here has identified other leadership processes related to eco-economy entrepreneurship and food and crafts networks, which were identified with in-depth interviews. Therefore, there is a specific human and social capital attached to these activities in which women's work is particularly significant as has been identified in women's local food production in other remote rural areas (Anthopoulou, 2010). These are crucial

elements with respect to social sustainability, since the density of social capital is essential in generating cooperation networks and providing practical action (Lehto & Oksa, 2009). However, women's long working hours and multiple burden (Carbó et al., 2013) impinge upon their capacity to fully commit to developing the new businesses and, in consequence, their contribution to sustainable local development. In this regard, equality policies should also make women's work more visible, including a decentralized approach to the productive life.

The caring aspect of people's lives is another issue that must be incorporated into the sustainability approach (Ahl, 2006). Otherwise, structural inequalities are reproduced, leading to women's self-exploitation, as is often seen to be the case in rural tourism (Carbó et al., 2013). Hence, integrated policies are needed in remote areas, particularly with respect to the environment, rural development, gender, youth, and policies on immigration and social inclusion. Indeed, promoting complementary relationships between rural and urban areas is stated as a key issue for sustainable rural development in the Spanish law. Furthermore, this urban-rural complementarity, together with social inclusion and social innovation, frame the central concerns of the new Rural Development Policy 2014-2020 and the Agenda 2020. This may present an excellent opportunity and challenge as this policy is heavily focused on the need to develop place-based strategies with the so-called "community-led local development" approach.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Environmental assets have always been the main resources of the HCP due to its location. Urban-rural flows have been identified in the HCP, particularly related to natural areas. Taking into account the naturbanization approach we could explain how this environmental capital performs new functions in this remote area with high natural values framed in PNAs.

From this point of view, the study results reveal the positive influence of the region's PNAs in attracting and retaining dwellers and, with them, the new economic strategies that are connected with the ecological economy in most cases. Research results show that when new dwellers become permanent residents they are likely to generate new employment closely linked to the emerging eco-economy path. In this context, entrepreneurship by women is an emerging factor in rural renewal, as it is backed up by the extensive literature review. For this reason we have identified approximate

indicators of its importance in the HCP.

The results show that women's participation in these life strategies is increasing, as a response to the lack of work in the area. When taking advantage of the new economic space, women combine local comparative advantages while embedding everyday life originating in their rural dwelling. The outcome shows positive benefits of women's socio-economic empowerment. These are extremely relevant signs as women's inclusion is a pending issue in rural areas, particularly when they are remote (Copus et al., 2006; Tolón & Lastra, 2009; Herslund, 2012; Forsberg & Stenbacka, 2013).

The new ecological and economic enterprises provide women with a flexible, creative, and innovative job. These eco-enterprises are located in small towns, often within or near natural parks. This counteracts land use intensification in the lower valleys, retaining extensive farming and added value farm products in the upper valleys, which are now often associated with the eco-development activities (organic production, permanent pastures, sale of food directly to the final and local consumer). This, in turn, favours a high balance of biodiversity of natural and semi-natural landscape matrices in these areas. These newcomers' settlements reduce, at the same time, the dichotomy between the visitors' interests and the permanent inhabitants' interests.

According to these findings, the attraction of new residents, as a key element in PNA's management plans, offers an opportunity to enhance sustainable, local development strategies. In this sense, it is important to emphasize the need to strengthen the role of PNA managers to implement environmental capital in local development strategies, as this can provide compatible views of ecological conservation with economic development and include the social capital associated with the development of the ecological economy and the local food mainstream (Nechodom, 2005; Pallarès-Blanch, 2009; 2012).

Along this line of reasoning, gender mainstreaming policies should be integrated with rural development policies in order to improve social inclusion in rural development strategies (Bock, 2015). Since eco-entrepreneurial strategies operate at individual, family, and community level, although small and few, they create projects which are relatively more important in depopulated mountainous areas, like the HPC, than in urban areas (Ianoş et al., 2010). A comparative advantage is identified when eco-entrepreneurs can sell their crafts for the tangible economic values and also the intangible ones associated with the regional environmental capital.

Previous experiences of comparative advantage strategies exist, as in the case of a dairy cluster providing a sustainable milk production model in ecological and economic terms during the twentieth century (Tulla et al., 2009). Despite that, this model is not guaranteed to be sustainable in social terms because of the decrease in the volume of farming. Moreover, some farms replaced commercialising the milk with the Cooperative by producing their own dairy value-added products.

Therefore, new models of collective organization are needed to support these new emerging life strategies and eco-development enterprises while they show much consistency with sustainable development principles and, consequently, they should be at the centre stage of the new local development strategy in the new LEADER programme.

Aknowlegments

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