

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

MARINE TOURISM AS AN OPTION FOR SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT BASED ON FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

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The evolution of the socio-economic, political and environmental conditions is affecting the fishing activity in the European Union and, specifically in Spain and Galicia, they have generated a profound crisis situation in the sector (Molina *et al.*, 2010; Miret-Pastor *et al.*, 2015). For this reason, it is urgent to implement diversification strategies that strengthen local economies by providing them with complementary sources of income (Farnet, 2011; Moreno-Muñoz and García-Marín, 2019). In this scenario, the productive reorientation of fishing for tourism becomes a valuable example of revitalization and sustainable coastal development (Howard and Pinder, 2003; Molina *et al.*, 2010; Pardellas *et al.*, 2011; Ling and Chiao, 2017; Herrera-Racionero *et al.*, 2018; Moreno, 2018a) in which the active participation of seafaring women have been at the forefront (Martínez García, 2017).

Thanks to the outsourcing of the fishing sector, it has been possible to conserve elements of the maritime cultural heritage that, otherwise, would have disappeared (Howard and Pinder, 2003; Doyon, 2015; Gràcia, 2016; Jiménez and García, 2018). Through the process of 'heritagisation', the marine culture, the fishing facilities and the local gastronomy based on seafood products, these have managed to become not only heritage resources *per se* but also economic resources that promote development (Ling and Chiao, 2017; Rogelja and Janko, 2017; Jiménez and García, 2018).

Although it cannot be seen as the definitive solution to the structural difficulties faced by fishing but, in certain territories, it is helping to improve the living conditions of these coastal populations and contributes to promoting better management and understanding of the resources (Farnet, 2011; Claesson, 2011; Khakzad and Griffith, 2016; Ling and Chiao, 2017). Undoubtedly heritage, culture and tourism are, today, totally interrelated (Jiménez and García, 2018).

In this conservation process, marine tourism has contributed greatly to promoting the cultural value of fishing and the preservation of heritage and identity (Claesson, 2011; Jiménez and García, 2018) but the relevant role should not be forgotten historically performed by seafaring women considered “guardians” of fishing traditions (Nadel-Klein, 2000), especially with regard to intangible culture.

The development of marine tourism has been possible thanks to the commitment made by the Administration, the tourism sector and the sailors’ guilds (Chen, 2010; Herrera-Racionero *et al.*, 2018; Moreno, 2018b), without forgetting the context favorable of the market itself (Padin and Aboy, 2010; Pardellas and Padín, 2013; Bender, 2015; Voyer *et al.*, 2017; Lafuente, 2019). Among the main activities that can be carried out under the “marine tourism” tourist typology are, for example, visits to fish markets, ports, museums ... (Padin and Aboy, 2010), visits to historical sites such as lighthouses, buildings, coastal towns ... (Claesson, 2011), fishing-tourism as one of the most unique activities (Moreno, 2018a) and, of course, all the immaterial part that allows knowing ways of life, traditions, arts and crafts (Jiménez and García, 2018).

On the other hand, tourism entrepreneurship has received limited attention in the academic literature (Solvoll *et al.*, 2015; Movono and Dahles, 2017; Power, *et al.*, 2017, Mottiara *et al.*, 2018) despite its recognized impacts social, environmental and economic factors in local development and its prominent role both for the empowerment of women (Datta and Gailey, 2012; Kimbu and Ngoasong, 2016) and for the promotion of gender equality (UNWTO, 2011).

Indeed, the promotion of entrepreneurship in general and female entrepreneurship in particular has become a key option in economic incentive programs, rural development and even equal opportunities. Thus, under the protection of the Local Fisheries Action Groups (FLAGs), various marine tourism initiatives have emerged in Spain that have become pioneers, both at a business level and at an associative level.

It should be added that marine tourism in Spain, although it has advanced in recent years, is still in an incipient phase and, in any case, is very irregular (Pardellas and Padín, 2013; Miret-Pastor *et al.*, 2015; Herrera-Racionero *et al.*, 2018). Some of the initiatives promoted have been short-lived due to various cultural and financial inconveniences and, above all, due to restrictive legislation (Miret-Pastor *et al.*, 2018; Lafuente, 2019), but in other cases they have known how to adapt to the tourism market.

Based on all these considerations, the general objective of this work has focused on studying Galician marine tourism as a local development option from the perspective of sustainability and female empowerment.

The case of study is Galicia, a territory with a historical relationship with the sea and the fishing sector at a cultural, social and economic level (Martínez García, 2019). To achieve the specific objectives of this research, secondary and primary information has been collected and analyzed, with a qualitative study through 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews with women who lead projects in marine tourism. The purpose is to delve into the objectives of business projects, as well as the perception of entrepreneurs on the impact of marine tourism on local development, from the perspective of sustainability.

The content analysis of the interviews is supported by the software of the ATLAS.TI program (Version 8.1.3) and is carried out taking into account the categorical variables of analysis framed in three thematic dimensions, which respond to the proposed objectives:

- Female tourism entrepreneurship supported by FLAGS.
- Objectives of the business project.
- Impacts of the projects on local development from the perspective of sustainability.

Qualitative-quantitative content analysis has also been applied, through the written press during the years 1990-2020 through the FACTIVA search tool, to determine the presence of marine tourism in Galicia and the social representation of female entrepreneurship in this context.

Through this work, a deeper knowledge of the vision and perception of women has been obtained, as central protagonists of this study, in their relationship with marine tourism. The results will allow taking the corresponding actions in the planning and management of sustainable marine tourism.

Regarding the most important findings, it is worth mentioning that a large part of the projects analyzed is characterized by being original projects that respond to the real needs of the territory, both at a social, economic and cultural level. These marine tourism initiatives are also shown as defined diversification strategies that reinforce and promote local development, since they represent a complement to the local economy, following the needs established by FARNET(2011). In summary, the results confirm that marine tourism is presented as a typology of sustainable tourism (Ling and Chiao, 2017) and are projects whose consumption is based on the cultural (tangible and intangible) and natural heritage of the coastal towns under study.

It should also be noted that job creation for women is one of the recognized objectives of rural development. In this sense, it is also necessary to show that, through these business initiatives, the visibility of women entrepreneurs has been improved and social awareness about the importance of their contribution to the tourism sector has increased. Women empowerment and leadership processes and associations have also been favored, among other benefits. However, as has been corroborated as a result of the content analysis in the press, despite the progress that has been made in terms of equality and recognition of these women's labor rights, there is still much work ahead to achieve full integration. For this reason, at the moment in which the new action strategies of the FLAGS are rethought, it will be necessary to continue assessing the incentives (financial, administrative support, training ...) to support female entrepreneurship that must be attracted, retained and developed.

In the Galician case, at present, it cannot be said that maritime tourism is a complementary means of income for the fishing sector since, for the most part, the companies involved are tourism. However, the work they do to promote maritime culture is unquestionable and with their work, they are favoring the conservation and promotion of fishing and all its culture.

While maritime tourism is a diversified product, there are skeptics who argue that demand is still insufficient to be profitable. However, once the results of the study have

been presented, it seems coherent to affirm that marine tourism has the potential to improve its effectiveness in a quasi-present future, in a post-COVID 19 context, where tourists are forced to search for activities that offer a more playful experience (Fernández, 2020), without overcrowding and closer to the enjoyment of the original and authentic (Vargas Sánchez, 2020).

In conclusion, the entrepreneurial work carried out by these professionals has allowed the dynamization and development of these rural areas of the coast through both the creation of wealth and employment and the improvement of the conservation and enhancement of resources. With this, it can also be verified that on the Galician coast women entrepreneurs are working in line with the SDGs, which gives them great importance, given that these micro-challenges could translate into macro challenges at the destination level more easily.