

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

# THE ROLE OF RURAL WOMEN IN EXTREMADURA IN THE TOURISM OFFER: A VISION FROM THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE OF THE LEADER INITIATIVE AND THE PRODER PROGRAM

*Ángela Engelmo Moriche*

Universidad de Extremadura

angelaengelmo@unex.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5330-2203>

The search for new and better job opportunities, a consequence of the economic and demographic changes occurring in the 20th century, altered the way of life in rural areas of Europe. These changes are produced by a transfer of labor from agricultural activities, in rural areas, to the industrial and service sectors, in urban areas (rural exodus). Within this process, women were the group that emigrated the most, in an attempt to escape from their status as unpaid housewives. The consequences of the rural exodus were a loss of population, less economic development and a strong masculinization due to the departure of women in rural Europe. With the intention of regulating the employment opportunities of the rural population to those of the urban population, the EU promoted the Leader Initiative in 1991. The objective was to create new economic activities to complement agricultural incomes in order to maintain the population and slow down regressive demographic processes. In the early days of Leader, the role of women was not highlighted, despite the fact that the gender issue had been present in development policies since the 1970s. It was not until the World Conference on Women, organized in 1995 by the United Nations, that it was established that countries should include the gender perspective in their public policies. Thus, it was not until the third Leader period (Leader Plus 2000-2006) that the gender issue appeared for the first time in European rural development policy. In this way, priority support was given to strategies aimed at increasing employment opportunities and activities for women and other disadvantaged groups in rural development, such as young people.

But it was not only Leader that supported the economic development of rural areas. Due to the good results obtained during Leader I, there was an increase in applications for the new period, Leader II. The lack of funding to accommodate all the territories, led countries such as Spain to create a program developed on a national basis, but with similar objectives to Leader. This program was developed through the Community Support Framework (CSF) and was called the Operational Program for the Development and Economic Diversification of Rural Areas (Proder). As for actions aimed at women, the Proder Program in its second period, Proder II, adopted the initiative proposed by Leader, promoting and encouraging the participation of women.

Within the Leader Initiative and the Proder Program, tourism, together with the creation and/or improvement of SMEs or the revaluation of heritage, was one of the measures with the highest participation. For example, during Leader I, female participation captured more than 50% of the funding in the tourism measure. In this way, a synergy was established between rural women and tourism, with women being the main protagonists in a masculinized, aging area with an economy dependent on an agricultural sector that is not very productive and of low profitability. In addition, the promotion of tourism led to the financing of a new tourist offer, accommodation and catering services, which served as a basis for the inclusion of these areas in the tourist markets. Thus, the objective of this study is to analyze whether the Leader Method (from Leader II and Proder I 1995-2000 to EAFRD 2007-2013) has complied with the principle of equality in the investments made in tourism supply through the Extremadura LAGs.

The Leader Method started in Extremadura in 4 LAGs. Subsequently, this methodology was extended to a large part of the national territory, until reaching the current 24 groups, which occupy the entire regional territory, except the 4 urban centers: Badajoz, Cáceres, Mérida and Plasencia with more than 50,000 inhabitants. These 24 groups have executed more than 8,000 projects, which have been reviewed and analyzed to verify which projects financed tourism offering, which of them were still active and which was the beneficiary receiving the aid. Among the beneficiaries financing tourism offerings, it was estimated that at a general level the beneficiaries were mostly self-employed, followed by business groups. By periods, the participation of self-employed and autonomous beneficiaries has not always been equal, since the female participation during Leader II and Proder I was 36.1% in the former and 44.7% in the latter, but with the inclusion of the gender perspective these data increase to over 45% in Leader and 50% in Proder. During Feader the trend will stabilize at around 45%.

Looking at the LAGs, different trends can be observed in terms of projects and investments. By groups, with a higher percentage of self-employed women than men, there are seven very different territories, both economically and demographically. In this group, it can be seen that there is a trend of greater participation of women in the province of Cáceres, where the existence of a smallholder agricultural economy with lower productivity has led to the need for greater diversification of family economies. Also, the existence of natural and heritage resources and their proximity to tourist points of origin, such as Madrid, have favored investments in tourism and the participation of female promoters. It should be noted that there is a higher proportion of promoters in the Proder LAGs than in Leader, 6 and 2 respectively, accounting for 20% of the LAGs in Leader and 43% in Proder. It is worth mentioning that, without being a European Initiative, as Leader, Proder has been able to provide incentives to female promoters in their territories, perhaps, in part, due to the greater flexibility of the Proder Program regulations. These 8 groups are among those that have made the largest investments in tourism, especially those located in mountain areas such as Valle del Jerte, Hurdes, Las Villuercas-Ibores-Jara or Sierra de San Pedro-Los Baldíos, all of them with more than 4 million investments. This shows a relationship between total investments and the number of female promoters. In those territories where the development strategy has focused more on tourism and where there has been a greater number of projects, the role of women has been more relevant.

In the second group, with a participation of between 35 and 50% of promoters, there are two LAGs with an equal share, although both territories are among those with the lowest number of projects and investments in tourism. The Lácara LAG, because it does not yet have a definite offer (mainly due to its scarce natural or heritage resources) and the Monfragüe LAG, which has a very definite natural offer due to the National Park. These are very small and aging municipalities, with little business fabric that are slowly developing an offer of accommodation and restaurants, and are still among the territories with the lowest attraction capacity. On the other hand, 6 LAGs with very different characteristics. 3 LAGs located in the north of the region in mountain areas whose agricultural economy has been complemented over the years with investments in tourism due to the richness of their natural resources, closely related to the exploitation of mountain tourism and water resources. The rest has very different characteristics from each other and with respect to the previous ones. From two LAGs with greater dynamism, one due to irrigation and the other with an economy associated with the service sector, cattle and pig farming and the processing and iron and steel industry, and the other LAG with an economy related to the exploitation of olive groves, chestnut and cherry trees, as well as hunting. This shows that, with some exceptions, in those territories where investments and strategies have been predominantly in the tourism sector, as opposed to other investments such as SMEs or the agricultural sector, greater participation of women in the promotion of projects has been made possible. It can be determined that the greater the number of investments and projects, the more women see more options to participate in the economic dynamism of the region and in the tourism sector.

Lastly, the LAGs with less than 35% of female promoter participation. The 7 LAGs located in this group, 4 in the province of Badajoz and 3 in the province of Cáceres, show the existence of a difference between the provinces of the region. The province of Badajoz, due to its economic characteristics (greater development of irrigated agriculture or profitable rain-fed farms such as vineyards and olive trees), a larger previous business fabric related to the agricultural sector and a lower supply of natural resources related to the mountains and water, have led to lower investments in tourism and, therefore, to a lower number of female promoters. The territories with the highest number of female promoters are associated with the highest number of projects and investments and with strategies related to the exploitation of mountain natural resources. It should also be noted that, except for one LAG, all the groups have been Leader Initiatives. This is partly due to the fact that the state regulations of the Proder Program were more flexible than the European ones and did not require an equitable distribution of sectors, so that in some LAGs investments in tourism were given too much priority.

In general terms, 1049 projects have been financed for the creation or improvement of accommodation and catering services. Of these, an average of approximately 61% are active, due to various factors such as the increase in the number of tourists in the region, the presence of natural and heritage resources, real investments, a favorable location with respect to the main tourist sources such as Madrid, etc. In terms of self-employed promoters, women have a success rate of 44.4% in Leader and 50.5% in the Proder Program. It should be noted that there have been a greater number of projects and investments in Proder aimed at tourism than in Leader, and this has meant that the greater the resources,

the greater the chances of survival. In addition, many of these Proder Groups have focused their strategies on tourism as a priority, and have therefore created a greater integrated offer of accommodations and catering services that have survived better than other groups that have financed isolated projects with poorer results because they have not benefited from the synergies of other tourism services implemented in their territories. By type of accommodations, the female promoters have allocated more financing to investment in rural type accommodations, especially in rural houses, since, being small businesses in their management and simpler maintenance, they have made it possible to make it compatible with other jobs or with family life and continue to generate income. This typology is the one with the highest degree of survival and is related to the areas where the greatest investments have been made, mostly in mountain areas with rich natural resources (water and mountains).

The results of the analyses carried out show that the weight of women has been increasing since the beginning of this type of aid. Thus, it could be said that the inclusion of the gender perspective in rural development policy has had optimum results. However, although the Leader Method has fought for equality and equity in the gender perspective, there is still a lot of work to be done. While it is true that women are returning to the rural world, their role does not seem to have changed from that of housewife caring for and/or serving the family to caring for and/or serving tourists. As already mentioned, there is still a long way to go for gender equity to become a reality, both in rural and urban areas, but it should not be forgotten that the steps already taken in this area are an excellent basis for future generations of women, especially for women in rural areas.