Article

EUROPEAN URBAN AND REGIONAL STUDIES

European Urban and Regional Studies
2016, Vol. 23(4) 734–749

DOI: 10.1177/0969776414539338
eur.sagepub.com
SAGE

Rural sustainability, inter-generational support and mobility

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Abstract

The issue of the resilience of rural areas has again emerged as a result of the economic recession, particularly in the countries of Southern Europe, which have been especially hard hit by cuts in the provision of services. In this paper we focus on the Spanish case to explore the role that mobility plays in the central age groups of the age pyramid in rural sustainability. Based on the results obtained from a representative survey of the population and in-depth interviews carried out between 2008 and 2012, we show how demographic composition and mobility strategies are two central factors in considering the future of rural areas. Their medium and long-term effects have been considered separately, but in this article, their inter-relationship is analysed in the context of the sustainability of Spanish rurality. The conclusions point to the dual effect of mobility: on the one hand, it regulates the actual subsistence of rural populations to the point of making them highly dependent on cars; on the other hand, it transmits social inequalities in the social structure, such as those related to gender.

Keywords

Gender, mobility, resilience, rural sustainability

Introduction: Mobility and rural resilience

The protracted economic downturn is having a tremendous impact on Southern Europe (Hadjimichalis, 2011) especially on the quality of life of its rural populations and the competitiveness of its rural regions. The resilience and sustainability of these areas is related to a new cycle of budget cuts resulting in greater geographic concentration in public services (Rivera and Camarero, 2013). These are policies that, since the 1980s, have increased the distance and

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mobility necessary to access rural areas, converting these factors into important characteristics of contemporary rural change (Woods, 2005). In addition, as these factors affect those groups that use these services the most, "this produces a double disadvantage that is a distinctive feature of social exclusion in rural areas" (Woods, 2005: 105).

Accessibility and mobility are connected in many ways to the future of rural areas in industrialized societies (OECD, 2006). For example, to the extent that the costs of the crisis are shifted onto rural residents (through the erosion of public services, disinvestment in infrastructure, lengthening of commutes), the positive perceptions many have of rural life in industrialized societies may change (Brereton et al., 2013). In addition, in its reports, the European Commission also considers the lack of accessibility and mobility as factors that define "absolute poverty" (European Commission, 2008b, 2011).

The latter issue is of vital importance in rural areas in Southern European countries where, as is the case in Spain, we find societies shaped by particularly vulnerable demographic, economic and residential structures (beset by ageing and residential dispersion) (Camarero, 2009). For example, the proportion of the rural population at risk of poverty in countries such as Greece and Spain is particularly high within the European context, and both countries have among the highest rates of poverty for the elderly and women (European Commission, 2008b).

Unequal access to opportunities in rural areas in comparison to urban areas has been well researched in relation to social inclusion (Higgs, 2008) and to changing future prospects regarding the provision of rural services (Moseley and Owen, 2008), related to changes in their supply and demand. At the same time, the policies aimed at addressing these problems have often focused on transportation or defining needs, obscuring the role of social networks in maintaining well-being and quality of life or in structuring inclusion and social participation (Cass et al., 2005; Sheller and Urry, 2006). For example, the role that family strategies and inter-generational solidarity plays in the resilience of rural society has received little attention.

The economic crisis also reveals the role that mobility and certain generations play in strategies of rural resilience in a paradoxical manner (Oliva, 2013). On the one hand, the decline in services (such as public transport) and infrastructure investment (such as in new roads) restricts rural mobility. On the other hand, the impact of the measures taken to reduce the state deficit (such as the geographic concentration of schools and healthcare and welfare services, and the closing of facilities) entails greater mobility, especially for those rural generations that play the central role in family strategies (providing care and assistance, carrying out productive and consumption activities), and have to increase their mobility to carry out their role.

Our work addresses the role played by mobility and inter-generational solidarity in rural resilience. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the role played by the mobility of what we refer to as the "support generation" in the sustainability of Spanish rural areas. This generation is made up of the cohort between 30 and 50 years of age and it is the generation that holds the (social, demographic, economic) fabric of the rural world together. It is a group responsible not only for the maintenance of productive activities, but also for the provision of care and assistance to dependent groups (children and the elderly), especially in those geographic areas undergoing demographic decline and with problems of accessibility.

The rural population in Spain is characterized by unbalanced demographic structures (low birth rate, imbalances between generations, ageing and masculinized populations) (Camarero, 2009). The difficulties reproducing the population in many rural areas will shape their future evolution as societies, economies and cultures (Brown and Schafft, 2011). If in its generic definition, sustainability makes reference to the relationship between generations, these imbalances threaten all aspects of rural sustainability (economic, social and environmental sustainability).

However, even though the sustainability of Spain's rural population is threatened, this does not mean it is going to disappear. Social systems are resilient; they are not entirely determined by their surrounding environment, as they also have the capacity to act and respond to changes. Rural populations respond to imbalances and issues of sustainability by increasing their resilience. McCanus et al. (2012) include in their definition of resilience the idea of "stable adaptation", in contrast to the

evolutionary conception of Holling (2001), which requires dynamic systems that respond to the environment. Stable adaptation (Sorensen and Epps, 2005) sees resilience as a mechanism that preserves the structure through reinforcing primary relationships and defending existing social capital and acquired status. The response to environmental changes is sought within the social system itself (McCanus et al., 2012).

Agyeman (2005), on the other hand, has proposed the term "just sustainability" to indicate that the sustainability debate is fundamentally a debate about rights among contemporaries and future generations. Hermans and Knippenberg (2006) developed the concept of resilience as "generational justice". From this notion, sustainability of rural areas becomes a key element in the political agenda. The need to guarantee a better quality of life for everyone, now and in the future, in a fair and equitable manner, and within the limits of the ecosystem (Agyeman and Evans, 2004), serves as a reference for rural governance. As Marsden and Hines (2008) have noted, sustainability is a social issue; thus, "there needs to be two-way positive interactions between community and sustainability. Both, in other words, need each other" (p. 27).

Our conclusions point to the dual effect of mobility: on the one hand, it regulates the actual subsistence of rural populations, as they become highly dependent on the car; on the other hand, it transmits social inequalities in the social structure, such as those related to gender. Inter-generational solidarity, the structure of gender relations (Harding, 1996) and mobility have been considered the primary mechanisms for coping with the imbalances that have developed in rural societies. In our analysis we look at all these factors as aspects of resilience in rural populations. Our starting hypothesis is that the "support generation", as organizing agents of group mobility, combines all of them in their strategies in response to the challenges – such as the economic recession – and imbalances faced by rural societies today.

In what follows we first analyse the relationship between mobility and sustainability in rural areas, focusing special attention on the consequences of the growing deroutinization of time and social spaces and the role of women's mobility. We then explain the methodology used for our study. In the next section we present the results of our analysis and the role that the daily mobility of the support generation plays in the rural world in Spain. We analyse the existing social asymmetries related to the automobile among different rural groups and focus on the cohorts of the "support generation" to illustrate how all of these processes connect in terms of mobility and women's employment. We also explore the tension underlying the pressure to symbolically regulate female mobility; that is, to guide the autonomy gained with the automobile by these generations of women through their traditional social gender designations. The main contributions of the study are summarized in the final conclusions, including its contribution to understanding the future of these areas.

Mobility and rural sustainability

Mobility is recognized as a key factor in the quality of rural life in European policies (the objective of the third axis of European Union (EU) rural development policy for the period 2007–2013), as well as in combating rural poverty among young people and women (European Commission, 2008a). The social integration of rural regions and the revitalization of their economic and demographic structures will depend in great measure on how mobility can be articulated within local cultures and rural government policies. For example, more than half of the persons registered as employed in the 2001 census in Spain living in municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants were commuting daily to work outside their own municipality (Camarero, 2009). The strategic character of mobility in daily life in rural areas can be seen in the interest local action groups have in the issue and in initiatives such as "transport on demand" (in the region of Castilla and León), municipal car sharing initiatives, maintaining wheelchair accessible taxi services and making buses available between municipalities during holidays (as has been done in Navarre) (Cruz and Oliva, 2012).

Although mobility has become a key element in analysis and research aimed at understanding the changes taking place in the rural world today (Bell and Osti, 2010; Hedberg and Do Carmo, 2011), there is still much we do not know regarding rural social processes and practices, and mobility in particular. In

contrast to traditional approaches to transport, mobility must be understood to be movement with meaning (Cresswell, 2006). When we move, we do so based on commitments, social roles and family strategies that define the meaning of our mobility; for example, based on the functions and representations of gender, generations, local identity, lifestyle, forms of leisure and work (Camarero and Oliva, 2008; Oliva, 2010).

The social character of mobility and its relationship to inequality has led, in the area of ethics, to it being considered a specific capability (Kronlid, 2008) within a perspective on "substantial freedoms" first discussed by Nussbaum and Sen (1993). Nussbaum (2011) refers to internal capabilities and combined capabilities as corresponding to two different tasks of every "decent society". Combined capabilities "are defined as internal capabilities plus the social/political/economic conditions in which functioning can actually be chosen" (Nussbaum, 2011: 42). Thus, we can understand mobility as a combined capability in which the possibilities, for example, of the integration of rural residents into the labour market and leisure opportunities are not only influenced by their internal capabilities (skills, knowledge and education) but also directly related to conditions for autonomy and access to available resources, services and infrastructure.

Regarding the resources needed for sustainability, in rural areas mobility is highly dependent on the private automobile. As a result, it is connected to inequalities in contemporary society and substantially modifies the character of community. On the one hand, the centrality of the automobile turns it into a factor of vulnerability for many groups. For example, a study carried out by Shergold et al. (2012) illustrates the consequences of this dependency among elderly rural residents and therefore on the future of the increasingly ageing rural world. Thus, it is tied in a direct way to forms of governance and policies of inclusion to create fair access to opportunities and services. On the other hand, as Cass et al. (2005) pointed out in relation to the flexibility provided by the private automobile, it leads to the gradual erosion of the collective system of provision of services and resources, creating a "do-it-yourself" society, an expression that seems to take on special meaning in the rural world.

Deroutinization of time and space and social imbalances in rural mobility

The space–time flexibility gained by the use of the private automobile has multiplied the places and events that form the everyday life of rural groups. The *sociotopes* that structure daily life are increasingly individualized. As Urry (2004) has noted, the automobile encourages a much more subjective temporality shaped by the sum of numerous fragments of increasingly personalized times and spaces. The routine life of traditional rural societies and the patterns institutionalized by Fordist modernization have given rise to lifestyles that have increasingly come to be organized based on a constant planning of activities and the need to arrange meetings and space–time conjunctions. The sources of the contemporary rapid pace of life are found precisely in the erosion of the old, institutionalized times and spaces (Rosa and Scheuerman, 2008; Shoutherton, 2003), the effectiveness acquired to manage these private schedules with new means of communication and transportation, and the tendency to fill them with commitments that we take on as responsibilities (work and social life).

The accessibility and flexibility gained with the automobile exercise, in this way, as Urry suggested (2004), a coercive power. On the one hand, the hurry and the stress of today stem to a large degree from the incompatibility between the number of tasks included in our everyday time structures and the need to coordinate them as "deroutinized" relationships (Shoutherton, 2003: 15). That is, they are the product that results from the tension to carry out tasks under increasingly variable patterns instead of relying on structures of fixed events. However, once this becomes normal, this flexibility that only the private automobile can provide, it is assumed to be standard, a given, for all circumstances and subjects. The organization of multi-tasks, the perception of modern life as a form of "doing more things", the increasing need to move to maintain social networks, the culturally defined obligations and the need to synchronize everything with all the regular constrictions of work, school and taking care of others, form a new experience.

On the other hand, studies and policies on mobility have often considered populations as homogeneous entities, that is, without taking into account the

specificities of being part of one social group or another, or the subcultures, practices and assigned social roles that define them (Whipp and Grieco, 1989; Yago, 1983). This application of principles of neutrality, which could be considered a question of social justice, leads, in reality, to making the complex social imbalances regarding mobility invisible. As we have pointed out, mobility implies having a combination of varying private resources and personal skills; for example, the ability to drive declines with age. These elements allow us to analyse mobility as differential social capital (Kaufmann et al., 2004), which, as capital, can be increased or decreased and even exchanged for other capitals (economic, relational); for example, having access to better employment in labour markets outside one's municipality of residence. Access to employment outside locality of residence reveals the importance of mobility for women as a mechanism for autonomy. As Carbó et al. (2013) have stressed, the importance of self-employment among women in some areas is specifically determined by the difficulties that their own community places on them working outside the home.

Gender and automobility in rural areas

As Law (1999) suggested, mobility not only reflects unequal access to and control of resources, but also participation in a system of shared beliefs, which often reflect the hegemonic representations by which dominant groups establish their own definitions and differentiations regarding mobility for each social group; in other words, the different responsibilities and limitations men and women have regarding mobility, based on the mandates of gender (Cruz, 2006). Men and women, therefore, have very different life experiences in relation to their possibilities for movement.

Cattan (2008) reviewed several empirical studies that analysed commuting distances in metropolitan areas in relation to family circumstances. Her results coincide with those obtained in this study. In general, having more responsibilities is associated with commuting greater distances. Even in the 1980s it was shown that women who worked part-time, mainly because of family responsibilities, had, in contrast to what would be expected, longer commutes than those who worked full-time (Hanson and Johnston, 1985). The explanation for this effect is spatial labour market segregation by gender in rural areas, pointed to in the seminal work by Massey (1994), and in relation to commuting by Hanson and Pratt (1992). McDonald and Peters (1994, 2000) demonstrated the importance in rural areas of distance in relation to type of work. Commuting is possible if the reward – salary – makes it worth it.

Rosenbloom (1995) has shown for the entire United States that dependence on the car as a means of access to labour markets is greater among women than men and greater among women in rural areas than in urban areas. In addition, unequal access to mobility can be a mechanism that transmits and reproduces itself. This relationship has been found in different places and, as Hortjol has stated, "the study of men and women's daily travel patterns can be seen as a 'barometer' of the state of equality between men and women in society" (2008: 206).

Today the autonomy offered by the automobile is understood by young people to be essential for living in rural areas, and among older generations of women, as essential for their daughters. However, for younger generations of rural women, overcoming dependency, thanks to the private automobile, has led to symbolic latent tension regarding traditional gender roles (Cresswell and Uteng, 2008; Kwan, 1999; Murray, 2008; Noack, 2011; Rosenbloom, 1995).

As automobility becomes more widespread among rural women, there is also a latent tendency to normalize it within socially designated gender roles, especially starting at certain stages in the life cycle. It is a symbolic battle with underlying tensions over modulating a mobility that does not increase women's autonomy. For example, the study carried out by Noack (2011) in rural Scotland showed how "women's travel patterns and their participation in activities evidently derive from gender roles that remain traditional" (p. 79).

Methodology

The Spanish case is particularly relevant due to its contextualization in southern Europe, the ageing of its rural population and the weight that vulnerable groups have in its rural areas. We analyse here the results obtained from a representative survey of the rural population and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The Survey of the Rural Population (EPR-2008)

provided information on the population residing in Spanish rural areas (municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants) between the ages of 30 and 50. This was a large ($n = 1795$) and representative survey of the Spanish rural population and the technical file can be found in detail in Camarero (2009). The interviews analysed here proceed from case studies carried out in the region of Castilla and León. This Spanish region is interesting because of the ageing of its population and the existing difficulties in accessibility due to its geographic isolation.

The term "support generation" refers to their current central position in the demographic structure, to their numerical importance in comparison to previous and subsequent generations, to their role as caretakers of older persons and children, and to their involvement in the economic activity and social dynamic of rural areas. Men and women between 30 and 50 years of age have become the authentic pillar of support in Spanish rural society (Camarero, 2009). Due to its position in the life cycle, this is the most active generation, as so many productive and reproductive activities depend on it. In addition, as the most numerous generation, the maintenance of local and community life also depends on it. The term support generation has a certain similarity to the term "sandwich generation", a popular expression in Anglo-American regions, and which refers to those that are taking care of both their children and their parents. In this case, "support" adds the character of an almost unique generation, because of the smaller presence of the immediately prior and subsequent generations in the daily life of rural populations.

To explore the mobility strategies of this population group we have undertaken a study in two stages. Firstly, we have carried out a qualitative exploration through in-depth interviews based on certain sociological profiles in the Castilla and León region. The results of this first stage were used to prepare a second quantitative stage based on a representative survey of Spain's adult rural population (30–50 years old).

The region of Castilla and León was chosen because it has one of the lowest population densities in Spain along with very high indicators for *remoteness*. This region also has one of the highest levels of demographic disequilibrium between generations. Eleven interviews of between 90 and 120 minutes were carried out in this region by the research team. The interviews explored daily family mobility in its different dimensions: related to work, leisure and care of family members. The interviewees were chosen based on previously designed sociological profiles in function of different combinations of a total of eight variables – sex, age, education level, occupation, family situation, type of habitat, population density of habitat and availability of a private vehicle – considered particularly relevant for determining mobility strategies (see Chart 1). These profiles and the different combination of variables permit us to get a picture of the diversity of social positions and situations in relation to mobility. The use made of statements in the interviews is aimed at illustrating our analysis when they constitute cases that represent common social situations.

The in-depth analysis of these cases, through the identification and coding of their social practices, allowed us to design the statistical questionnaire that was subsequently used with our representative sample of the rural Spanish population between 30 and 50 years of age. The fieldwork was carried out by a company specialized in opinion surveys under the technical direction of the research team. The survey was stratified by size of habitat and age quotas. For the selection of interviewees, we used a multi-stage random method, with the municipalities as the units in the first stage and households in the second. In total, we carried out 1795 interviews, the sampling errors for the proportion being $p = q = 0.5$, with a confidence level of 95.45%: 2.36% for the total sample, 3.55% for the subsample men, and 3.16% for the subsample women. The questionnaire was designed with the objective of revealing the family and socioeconomic structures in which the support generation is integrated, as well as understanding their role in issues of growing importance in rural areas, such as the dependency of the elderly, the balancing of family and work, mobility and perceptions regarding the rural environment.

Mobilities and social inequalities in rural sustainability

Immobilized, motorized and dependent

In rural areas the car has become a major part of the pattern of everyday life, given that most public and private services or employment opportunities are found

Chart 1. Sociological profiles of the persons interviewed.

Code	Sex	Age	Education level	Occupation	Family situation	Location	Density	Driver's license and own vehicle
F1	Female	32	University graduate	Livestock farming – rural tourism	Married with small children	Remote	Low	Yes
F2	Female	64	Obligatory	Housewife	Married with school-age children	Remote	Low	No
F3	Female	37	Secondary	Housewife	Married with small children	Remote	Low	Yes
F4	Female	31	University graduate	Professional in rural tourism	Married with small children	Peri-urban	Medium	Yes
F5	Female	43	Secondary	Merchant	Separated with school-age children	Peri urban	High	Yes
F6	Female	49	University graduate	Sociocultural promoter	Separated with small children	Remote	Medium	Yes
F7	Female	43	Obligatory	Livestock farming	Married with school-age children with	Remote	Low	No
M1	Male	38	Secondary	Tourism	Married with small children	Peri-urban	Low	Yes
M2	Male	28	Secondary	Industrial worker	Single living with mother	Remote	Low	Yes
M3	Male	45	Obligatory	Industrial worker	Single living with mother	Remote	Medium	No
M4	Male	38	Secondary	Technician	Married with small children	Remote	Low	Yes

outside the municipality. As one of our interviewees explained: "I live twenty minutes away from anything, from the supermarket, the petrol station, the bank, a cash machine, healthcare centre… twenty minutes from any possibility of work outside the home that I might do" (F1, female, 32 years old). This is the experience of a motorized rurality unfolding in post-metropolitan space–time landscapes, where the movement and flow between localities, rural and peri-urban areas, have made the private automobile indispensable for this way of life.

This disposition towards daily mobility is normal in these environments, given that most work, social relations and consumption activities take place going back and forth between different places: "I have to use the car 27 times a day" (F7, female, 43 years old); "Go there, go here, wherever, be in the car going back and forth" (M1, male, 38 years old). The new deroutinized and increasingly individualized space–time structures have reinforced this process considerably, expanding families' need for and dependence on the automobile. For example, local residents who work in the same city are often unable to coordinate their commuting because their schedules are not compatible (Oliva and Camarero, 2002). As one of our interviewees said: "Here you get the driver's licence and a car at 18… Here, the father, mother, son and daughter have a car. Everybody has a car here" (M3, male, 45 years old); "Here the majority of people have a car…. A licence and a car when they are 18" (M2, male, 28 years old).

However, the centrality of the automobile in rural areas also creates social imbalances that reveal the vulnerability faced by specific groups and the unequal power relations that are structured around a vicious circle generating the need for private automobiles and the erosion of public transportation (Oliva, 2010). Those who lack this resource (automobility as social capital) are relegated to a dependent position, possibly excluded from opportunities and services.

Table 1. Index of precariousness of employment by sex and relationship to driving.

	Men	Women	Total
Drives daily	1.29	1.75	1.46
Not drives daily	1.42	2.14	1.51

Source: EPR Survey.
Note: 1 = minimum precariousness; 5 = maximum precariousness.

In addition, in those rural areas with a difficult geography, this exclusion can become evident in an extreme manner, even when referring to relatively short distances; for example, in mountainous areas lacking public transport and with long winters. As one of our interviewees pointed out: "Here if you can't drive a car, … you can't work" (M3, male, 45 years old). Identifying these situations and their sociological profiles is central to understand how rural societies work and the role played by the "support generation" in their social sustainability.

The data from our survey of the rural population in Spain demonstrates the relationship between the use of the automobile and reducing precariousness in employment.[1] Table 1 shows the difference between persons who drive and persons that do not. There is greater precariousness among those who do not drive than among those who do. The differences are significant for the overall sample ($p < 0.001$) and the relationship between driving and the precariousness of employment exists for both men and women.

Having a greater level of mobility means being able to broaden the reduced and restrictive job possibilities in small localities. Its impact on reducing job insecurity has been especially significant in the case of young people in rural areas (Camarero, 2009). Within this group, those who have a high level of mobility (have jobs outside the municipality, their own car and take more than 20 minutes to get to work) also have jobs with better working conditions and promotion possibilities (managerial, technical or professional). In contrast, more sedentary groups (with low mobility), who are employed in their place of residence and do not have their own vehicle, have poorer working conditions and are often in unskilled jobs (Oliva, 2006).

Table 2. Percentage of individuals who live in households without a car by size of habitat.

	%
Fewer than 101 inhabitants	29.1
From 101 to 500 inhabitants	25.2
From 501 to 1000 inhabitants	23.3
From 1001 to 2000 inhabitants	21.7
From 2001 to 5000 inhabitants	19.9
From 5001 to 10,000 inhabitants	18.2
From 10,001 to 20,000 inhabitants	18.2
From 20,001 to 50,000 inhabitants	18.6
From 50,001 to 100,000 inhabitants	19.8
From 100,001 to 500,000 inhabitants	22.4
More than 500,000 inhabitants	29.9
TOTAL	21.9

Source: National Statistics Institute (INE) (2001), Population Census.

We can see how mobility acts as an instrument regulating social conditions in the rural environment – making it possible, for example, to expand employment horizons. Another approach to social imbalances related to mobility in rural areas in Spain is to distinguish those groups that are immobile and dependent from those that have a high capacity for movement. The latest systematic information available at the municipal level on this subject is the Population Census of 2001. This source makes it possible to identify the enormous generational heterogeneity regarding private motorized mobility. As can be seen in Table 2, more than one-fifth of the residents of small municipalities (with less than 5000 residents) live in homes without vehicles. While we also find similar figures in urban areas, cities and surrounding areas have much more public transportation available. As one of the interviewees says regarding his small municipality: "A bus comes in the morning, and later in the afternoon. No more. So, if you don't have a means of transport here, you can't do much…" (M2, male, 28 years old).

These rural residents who do not have a vehicle are primarily the elderly and dependent, characteristic populations in Spain's interior (Camarero, 2009). This is exactly where the paradox lies. In areas with the lowest levels of public transportation and with the highest levels of dispersion of healthcare and

welfare services (both public and private) we find the highest concentration of a dependent population in need of these same services. In other words, this is a population with fewer resources to achieve accessibility and, at the same time, extremely dependent on the private automobile. As our interviewees said:

> They don't have cars; people are old and can't drive any more. They always have to ask someone to take them to the medical centre, or to go shopping because there is nowhere to shop in these towns; the baker comes by and that's it. There isn't anything else. You understand? (M4, male, 38 years old)

The sustainability of this aged, rural population relies, as a result, on family support networks and in particular on the "support generation", which carries the burden of managing mobility.

The problem of immobility among the elderly in rural areas is in direct contrast with the high levels of motorization found among young people, workers in certain sectors (construction and manufacturing) and the exurban professionals who have moved to rural areas in the past decades (Oliva, 2010). One of the defining features of the latter groups is their increasing motorization: resulting on the one hand, from their roles as managers of family mobility that includes other generations (children and the elderly) and, on the other hand, from their having to commute to gain access to broader external labour markets with better employment conditions.

Mobility as transmitter of gender inequalities

A prior study (Camarero, 2009) revealed that providing care to family members conditioned the mobility of rural populations. Because immobile generations are supported by others who have the capacity and resources to get around every day, overcoming the time and space constraints of rural life, their dependent mobility combined with the lack or erosion of public services and resources multiplies the daily workload of the "support generation". Local well-being and quality of life are, as a result, based on this group being saturated with social commitments. Taking others to the doctor, to school or work, taking care of administrative tasks in county seats, doing the shopping, or attending to the unavoidable tasks of local sociability, fill the schedules of these generations. They also establish a pattern of constant rush that had previously defined only urban lifestyles: "I bring them, or I take them… I go back to the shop, I go back to get them (…) Okay, you know, if you have children… There are days when I say 'but I made nine trips today'" (F5, female, 43 years old); "You come here, then you go there. Wherever, right now it's not a problem for me to be in the car going back and forth" (M1, male, 38 years old).

However, within this special relationship with mobility there are also differences based on gender. The reduced mobility of women outside of their municipality of residence and, in comparison with men, their greater seclusion in the home has traditionally been explained by the normalization of their passive role (for example, not being drivers) due to the lack of local transport: "It's really unusual for women of a certain age to have a car here. Here the husbands have a car" (F2, female, 64 years old); "[My wife] doesn't drive…She depends on me for everything, which is a problem. It's a problem because here you need a car" (M4, male, 38 years old).

This dependent female mobility has functioned as a mechanism of social control. This control may be more explicit or coercive in certain cultures, or exercised in a more subtle way. As one of the interviewees pointed out "It's hard for me because you have to depend on your husband to go everywhere" (F7, female, 43 years old). This dependency is also linked to the ideological production of gender. For example, the intensification of masculine mobility or men commuting long distances can only function as employment and residential strategies alongside of female immobility or short-distance mobility to deal with the responsibilities of the household and family reproduction.

The survey carried out provides us with a very precise reading of the process by which mobility – and specifically unequal access to it – is a primary mechanism in the transmission of social inequalities. The relationship between mobility and precarious employment was pointed out at the beginning of this article. A detailed analysis of the data shows that

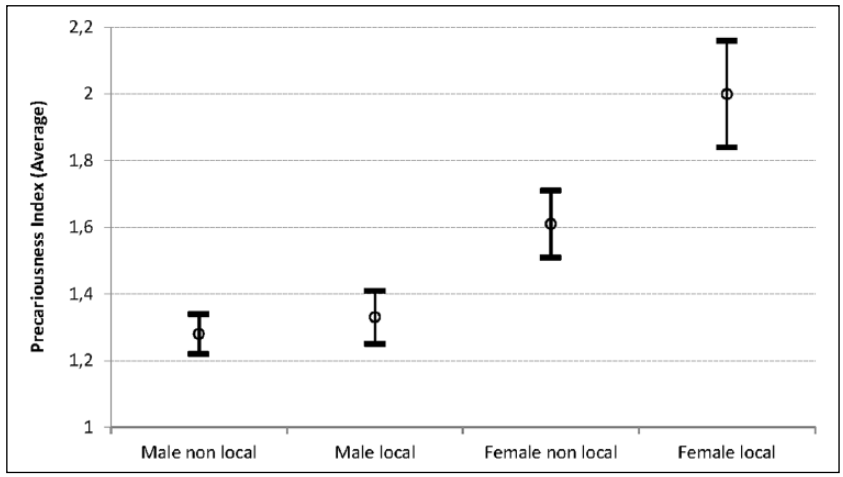

Figure 1. Index of precariousness by location of employment and sex.
Source: Survey of the Rural Population – 2008.

Table 3. People who usually drive, by level of education.

	Men	Women
Up to primary	88.2%	69.4%
Secondary	90.3%	79.0%
University	89.4%	83.3%

Source: EPR Survey.

precariousness is higher among women than men and much higher among women who are employed locally than for those who are employed outside their locality of residence (Figure 1).

The differences between women based on location of work as well as those between women and men are significant. However, as Figure 1 demonstrates, the differences between men based on location of work are not significant. That is, location of work produces differences in precariousness only for women.

However, to reach this conclusion, we must first look at the relationship of precariousness to level of education as a control variable, as this variable clearly has a high capacity to explain precariousness. We will first look at the relationship that exists between level of education and private vehicle usage for the support generation (persons between the age of 30 and 50). The data from the survey (Table 3) show that in the case of women there is a clear relationship between level of education and driving. For men, however, level of education does not produce any difference. The fact that level of education in the case of women has a relationship to driving shows that differences in mobility are directly related to gender inequalities.

Mobility seems to determine spaces for employment dependent on qualifications, and the access to a private vehicle as a strategy to overcome restricted job opportunities in local areas sustains the differences in education level. In other words, mobility becomes a variable that transmits inequalities in education level as well as in employment. However, this is only the case for women, which can be seen by comparing Figures 2 and 3. While there are no appreciable differences for men regarding precariousness by education level and employment location, for women precariousness is related to level of education. But mobility – in this case, lack of mobility – increases precariousness significantly. If mobility makes a difference in precariousness for women but not for men, it not only transmits social differences – such as those related to education level – but also gender differences.

The transmission of gender inequalities through mobility can also be seen by looking at

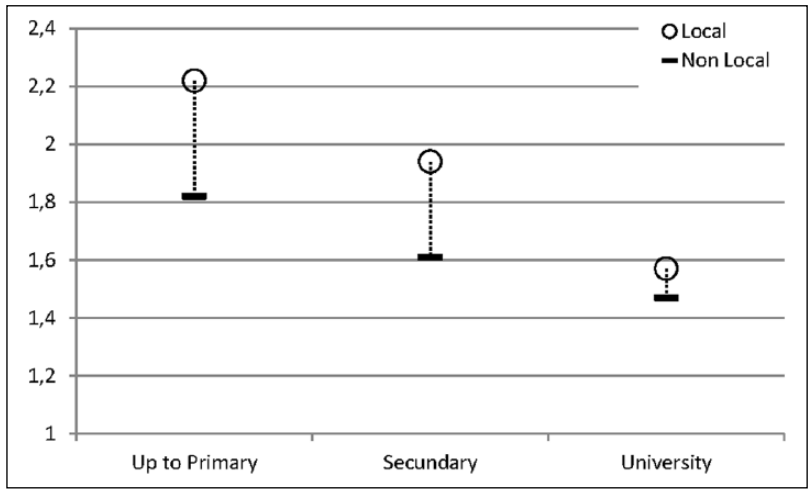

Figure 2. Index of precariousness by education and location of employment among women.
Source: EPR Survey.

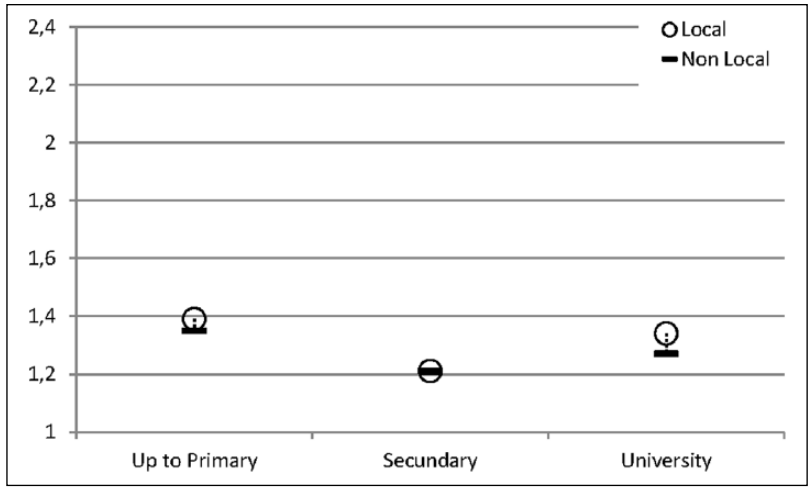

Figure 3. Precariousness index by education and employment locality for men.
Source: EPR Survey.

other indicators. For example, if we look at the average time spent commuting to work, we find that for men there are no differences by education level: basically 80% of men spend less than 30 minutes getting to work. For women, on the other hand, there are significant differences. The higher the level of education, the greater the distance between place of residence and work; in other words, the labour market is geographically much broader (Table 4).

On the other hand, if we look at the effect of family environment on mobility, the result is surprising: family environment variables, such as the presence of children, and elderly and dependent persons in the home, are not related to commuting (Table 5). However, to interpret this we must once

Table 4. Time commuting to work by sex and education level.

	Men			Women		
	Primary	Secondary	University	Primary	Secondary	University
Less than 30′	80.80%	79.80%	77.70%	93.70%	88.50%	74.00%
More than 30′	19.20%	20.20%	22.30%	6.30%	11.50%	26.00%

Significance level for subtables. Men $p = 0.697$. Women $p < 1/1000$.
Source: EPR Survey.

Table 5. Time commuting to work by sex and family characteristics.

	Men				Women			
	Without children <6/age	With children <6/age	Without dependants	With dependants	Without children <6/age	With children <6/age	Without dependants	With dependants
Less than 30′	78.7%	83.2%	80.0%	77.1%	87.4%	81.2%	86.9%	76.6%
More than 30′	21.3%	16.8%	20.0%	22.9%	12.6%	18.8%	13.1%	23.4%
(*n*)	626	177	711	92	413	130	493	50

Source: EPR Survey.

again look at the role of mobility as a transmitter of inequalities.

It is worth examining in greater detail the impact of mobility in this sphere, or how it appears that family circumstances are neutralized. To do this, we conducted a logistic regression analysis that relates commuting time as a dependent variable to family circumstances. The independent variables were "presence of children under 6 in the household", labelled "children 6", and "presence of dependent adults in the household", labelled "household dep". For the analysis, with both variables the reference category was their presence, coded as 1, with their absence coded as 0.

As can be seen in Table 6, for women, commuting more than 30 minutes to work is twice as likely for households with dependents than for households without dependents. The presence of children in the household also appears associated with an increase in the likelihood of commuting a greater distance to work; although the latter data are not significant at a 5% confidence level, the trend is in the same direction. For men, none of the variables are significant; for this reason we have omitted the respective table. The results show once again that mobility is a gender marker differentiating men from women.

Table 6. Regression adjustment for long work commutes (more than 30 minutes) by family responsibilities: Women.

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Children 6(1)	.487	.271	3243	1	.072	1628
Household dep(1)	.728	.361	4066	1	.044	2071
Constant	−2023	.158	163,872	1	.000	.132

Source: EPR Survey.

In short, what the data show us is that family structure does not have a significant effect on the fact of commuting (which is, however, related to education level), but it does affect the length of commute. Regarding persons only qualified for unskilled work, employment is found in the local labour market, as it is not worth it to commute. For persons with higher qualifications, the opportunities that mobility presents are greater for women without family responsibilities, thus paradoxically they may be in a position to opt for employment closer to home. Those who have more family dependants and less availability are more likely to have part-time jobs or

jobs with poor working conditions. Less choice means having to expand the labour market spatially.

Regulating female automobility

Younger generations of rural women perceive these forms of moral control as one of the disadvantages of living in a small town. They are the ones best able to identify the subtleties of social and family pressures, and the ones who have greater personal autonomy, as the capacity to break with social and spatial constrictions provided by private automobility is for them a prerequisite for living in rural areas, "If you aren't independent, if you don't have a car (…) you are doomed in this place" (F6, woman, 49 years old); "Women are freer; for example, I have a car in front of my house and I do more or less what I want, because of course I take the girls [her daughters]" (F1, female, 32 years old).

The abandonment or reduction of mobility or its limitation to traditional gender roles is linked to particular periods in the life cycle that redirect its functions to the area of family reproduction (maternity and childrearing, taking care of the elderly). For example, one of the women interviewed in our fieldwork talked about how she continued to be determined to drive after having her licence for years but without ever getting behind the wheel:

> I have been driving for five years now, but before I didn't because I was afraid (…) But I had to; the school was in the next town. [My husband] was working; my son got sick and I had to find a neighbour to take me (…) It's everything. You become really independent (…) Now I go to see my father, when my mother was ill I would take the car and wouldn't come back until the afternoon. I would go by myself! (F3, woman, 37 years old)

The symbolic control over female automobility represents well the tensions underlying the strategies by which social systems respond to the uncertainties of the environment. Women belonging to the support generation move around a lot, but very often they do so in a way dictated by the needs of others. The acts of taking care of dependent persons, childrearing and domestic work end up organizing their schedules based on gender imperatives assumed to be natural: "People I see at my children's school tell me, 'You're crazy, all day long with the car, taking your kids everywhere, all alone'" (F5, woman, 43 years old).

One might think that motherhood or taking care of dependent persons could impact mobility by reducing the movement of women in rural areas. However, the information gathered in our fieldwork shows that this is not necessarily the case. Although women have their own means of transport and great capacity for mobility, in daily social practices their mobility is much more determined by the family routines of dependent persons than is that of the men in the same family group. As one of our interviewees explained:

> I have to get organized to get my three children out the door. Just getting them dressed, giving them breakfast and getting myself dressed (…) takes a lot of effort. Many times as I am in the car to take them to school, I think: I've got to get back home (…)Then, afterwards (…) I've got about three or four hours to work (…) I'm getting faster and better at getting things done. (F4, woman, 31 years old)

Family responsibilities organize the movements of women, but they do not reduce them. They regulate their autonomy and condition the timing and distance of their movements in regard to personal activities and employment, both of which are subordinated to the needs and demands of the family.

Conclusions

The impact of the economic recession in southern Europe has again raised questions about the resilience and sustainability of rural areas. How have certain rural populations, subject to such important (economic and demographic) vulnerabilities and limitations (in terms of accessibility), continued to exist? The gradual concentration and closure of services has increased the travel distance needed to access them and the space where daily life takes place, creating a new division that "excludes a significant element of people in rural communities who do not have control over their own mobility" (Woods, 2005: 103). The context of the gradual ageing of rural populations in Europe and of a growing

dependence on the private automobile among these populations to maintain their way of life is raising numerous questions for researchers.

Our research reveals how the inter-generational support and private automobility of the central groups of the age pyramid function in rural areas in Spain as an adaptive mechanism. The demographic imbalances of Spain's rural habitats have made it possible for us to analyse the increase of automobility and inter-generational support as a dual mechanism of rural resilience. Both appear repeatedly combined in rural employment and settlement strategies, in the tasks of reproduction of family groups, and in the access to opportunities and services. Maintaining well-being and quality of life in rural areas is directly connected to these strategies and processes, which, as we have shown, do not develop without latent inequalities and tensions. The results of our study reveal the different effects of the increase in mobility in rural areas. On the one hand, it regulates the actual subsistence of rural populations, leading to a widespread dependence on the car. On the other hand, it also leads to intermediate generations playing a fundamental role in rural sustainability as they are most mobile and the only ones that can help others with mobility. Lastly, it transmits social inequalities in the social structure, such as those related to gender.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their critical comments and recommendations that have helped us improve the final version of this paper.

Funding

This work was supported by the projects "Red de Estudios Socioterritoriales" (CSO2011-15703-E) and "Mobility, social diversity and sustainability: the challenges of the European agenda for rural development" (CSO2012-37540).

Note

1. In what follows, an index of precariousness is used based on the types of work day – from full-time to working by the hour – and formal contracting of the worker. This index ranges from 1 (minimum precariousness = steady job and total time worked reported to social security) to 5 (maximum precariousness, which means working by the hour without being registered in social security).

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