

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

LABOR CULTURE OF THE SELF-EMPLOYED ENTREPRENEUR IN RURAL TOURISM

Gabriel López-Martínez

Universidad de Alicante

gabriel.lopez@ua.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8258-7260>

Pilar Espeso-Molinero

Universidad de Alicante

p.espeso@ua.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5876-3906>

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural areas globally face challenges stemming from depopulation, unemployment, and socio-economic vulnerabilities, prompting a search for revitalization strategies. Tourism entrepreneurship emerges as a potential solution, offering economic opportunities and leveraging unique local resources. However, not all tourism initiatives are equal. Unlike those driven purely by market rationality and demand adaptation, a specific form of entrepreneurship thrives in rural contexts: self-employment or family businesses. This type of entrepreneurship transcends purely capitalist logics, incorporating self-management, reconciliation of personal and economic life, and community-based approaches. These initiatives reimagine material culture and social relationships in rural settings, promoting resilience and sustainability.

In the literature we find a significant compendium of works that are interested in the characteristics of this type of entrepreneurship in rural contexts, and in their case considering them fundamental for job creation and community development. Although some proposals address these initiatives in relation to organizational and managerial aspects, hardly any attention is paid to the characteristics of the socio-labor structure of this type of entrepreneurship. In this sense, we understand that it is important to analyze to what extent the labor modality under which these rural entrepreneurs operate allows the sustainability of their own initiatives and their integration into the rural context. This is an approach that allows us to integrate material (labor modality and mode of production), motivational (economic and non-economic) and socio-cultural factors in order to understand to what extent they are interrelated and to delve into the dynamics that favor the adaptability of these enterprises in the face of issues such as depopulation or fluctuations in demand.

This article explores the role of self-employed entrepreneurs in rural tourism, particularly in the context of depopulation, unemployment, and socio-economic challenges

in rural areas. For this purpose, we delve into this specific socio-labour structure of rural tourism entrepreneurship, analyzing how it intertwines with the *life-modes* of autonomous or self-employed entrepreneurs to foster sustainable integration within rural communities. We argue that tourism entrepreneurship, often developed within the framework of self-employment or family-run businesses, offers an alternative to traditional, profit-driven business models. These ventures integrate self-management, personal well-being, and environmental sustainability. The study builds on the *life-mode theory* to analyze how rural tourism entrepreneurs balance personal aspirations with economic sustainability while contributing to local development.

2. OBJECTIVE

From a theoretical approach, the aims to examine the socio-labor structures of rural tourism entrepreneurs, focusing on the culture of self-employed individuals. We aim to understand how these entrepreneurs manage to maintain sustainable business models that align with the local cultural and environmental context. Additionally, the study seeks to evaluate the potential for these businesses to act as agents of local development, fostering socio-economic resilience in rural areas.

3. METHODOLOGY

Given the theoretical nature of this article, the methodological approach revolves around a critical review and synthesis of existing literature. This involves the exploration of key concepts and theoretical frameworks, with a particular emphasis on *life-modes theory*. This theoretical framework enables a deep exploration into the logics, decisions, and social reproduction strategies of rural tourism entrepreneurs. The analysis also considers the relationship between autonomous entrepreneurship and simple commodity production, drawing upon historical and sociological perspectives to understand the dynamics of these economic activities in the context of globalization and capitalist systems. Ultimately, the methodology provides an analytical lens through which to examine the interplay between macro-level economic forces and micro-level labour cultures.

4. RESULTS

The findings reveal that rural tourism entrepreneurs may operate under a model of simple commodity production, where they act as both producers and owners of their business. This model might allow for greater flexibility and resilience, as entrepreneurs can adapt quickly to market changes and rely on informal family labor during peak periods. The results from previous literature also highlight that these entrepreneurs are motivated by lifestyle choices, seeking to integrate their work with personal values such as sustainability and community engagement. Their businesses are deeply connected to the local environment, leveraging natural and cultural resources to offer unique tourism experiences.

The analysis reveals a unique labour culture within autonomous rural tourism entrepreneurship, distinct from both wage-earning and capitalist models. This culture would be characterized by:

- (1) Embeddedness in simple commodity production. Autonomous entrepreneurs operate within a framework of simple commodity production, acting as both producer and owner of the means of production. This allows for greater flexibility and adaptability, enabling them to adjust to local conditions and market fluctuations.
- (2) Emphasis on self-sufficiency and individual risk. These entrepreneurs may assume responsibility for all aspects of their businesses, investing their own capital, knowledge, and labour. This necessitates a high degree of self-sufficiency and a willingness to take on individual risk.
- (3) Integration of personal and economic life. The boundaries between work and personal life are blurred, as economic activity becomes intertwined with family relationships and individual aspirations. This fusion of spheres leads to a particular worldview where work is an intrinsic part of daily life, satisfying both economic and non-economic needs.
- (4) Agency and “political” intentionality. Beyond economic motivations, autonomous entrepreneurs demonstrate a capacity for agency, shaping the geographies of capitalism and contributing to the redefinition of their local environment.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of autonomy in these businesses. Entrepreneurs can make decisions quickly and tailor their offerings to meet the needs of both tourists and the local community. This adaptability is crucial in a rural context, where market demand can be unpredictable. The integration of work and personal life is another key finding, with family members often contributing to the business in informal capacities. This flexible labor structure allows entrepreneurs to maintain their businesses without the need for large-scale investments or external capital.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that rural tourism entrepreneurship, particularly in the context of self-employed individuals, offers a viable model for sustainable development in rural areas. These entrepreneurs are able to balance economic viability with personal well-being, integrating their businesses into the local community and environment. However, the study also notes the challenges faced by these businesses, including market volatility and the risk of over-dependence on tourism. The authors suggest that future research should focus on the long-term sustainability of these businesses and their potential to contribute to broader rural development strategies. Additionally, they emphasize the need for policies that support rural entrepreneurs, particularly in terms of access to resources and training.

Finally, although we find case studies that coincide with this theoretical assumption, it is not a model that is applied homogeneously in all rural contexts, nor does it presuppose only positive effects on the socio-economic fabric. The heterogeneity of rural environments, the differences in regulatory frameworks or the diversity of natural and cultural resources will explain the viability of this model. Furthermore, although rural tourism entrepreneurship under this formula can offer benefits, it also entails challenges such as

pressure on the territory's resources or risks derived from economic dependence on tourism activity. In this sense, it is necessary to address studies that contrast these theoretical assumptions with concrete field experiences and thus complete the empirical possibilities of this model.