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Factors influencing the decision of young adults to remain in their rural environment: Social origin, education and gender

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A B S T R A C T

This article analyses the circumstances and attitudes that explain why young adults from a specific area of inland Spain opt to remain in their rural place of origin.

The analysis is based on open interviews with 41 young adults born and raised in the area in question. The interviews show that at least a third of them plan to stay in their place of origin, while others acknowledge that they would like to do so although they believe it will not be possible.

The analysis reveals the important role that social origin, educational attainment and gender play in shaping the residential expectations of young rural adults, as these variables interact with each other and with the opportunity structure of the place. These interactions facilitate, on the one hand, the continued presence of those who have certain types of place-linked capital, and on the other, of males of low social origin and low educational level.

1. Introduction

The factors currently pushing young rural adults to leave their places of origin have been extensively analysed in the specialist literature (Cook and Woodman, 2020; Baek, 2004; Farrugia, 2016). In contrast, factors explaining why those who remain in their places of origin do so have been less studied, although they have acquired growing interest in recent years within the framework of second modernity theories (Beck, 1992) on the issues of youth mobility and identity (Shildrick et al., 2009; Farrugia 2014; Woodman and Leccardi, 2015). These theories openly argue that classical structural factors such as locality, kinship, social class or cultural predispositions are of limited importance in the construction of identity in late modernity, while the importance of individual factors such as educational achievements, professional prospects or personal preferences in consumption and lifestyle has been gaining strength (Jamieson, 2000; Wiborg, 2004).

In consequence, various authors have tried to find explanations as to why, despite the expulsive power of such individual factors, some young adults choose to stay on in the place where they grew up (Cook and Woodman, 2020). In this regard, explorations have been undertaken of the roles played in the choice that is made by certain types of social and economic capital linked to the place in question (DaVanzo, 1981; Kan, 2007), by social and familial relationships

(Kirkpatrick et al., 2005; Coulter et al., 2016; Elder, 1994) or by the 'sense of belonging' (Eriksson, 2017; Jones, 1999), which should be understood not as a given, but as an effect or consequence of relationships with people and places (Cuervo and Wyn, 2017) or as a result of participation in everyday or ritualised activities (Bell, 1999). These and other researchers have noted, at the same time, that mobility and identity, and thus place attachment or detachment, are intertwined with that place's structural conditions (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Nugin, 2019).

Following this line of research, this paper focuses on factors of a more structural tenor that explain why today, in the rural society of the 21st century, some young adults from a specific area of inland Spain are opting to remain in their rural environment. Special attention is paid to three determining variables: **social origin, education and training, and gender.**

In line with this objective, a description is given below of the features that define today's rural society and how such features affect feelings of rootedness in young adults. This is followed by a description of the study area and the research methodology. The results obtained in the research are then presented along with a discussion on the scope and contributions of these results to the body of knowledge on rural environment and society in the current debate.

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2. Rural society in the 21st century

In the present day, with the classical processes of the modernisation and economic transformation of rural areas done and dusted, a new rural society has emerged. This "new rurality" (Grammont, 2004) is highly heterogeneous, with different dynamics, processes and outcomes that depend on the position and mode of integration of different countries and regions in global value chains. This heterogeneity is evident in that not all rural areas of Europe are losing population (Vaishar et al., 2020). Van Eupen et al. (2012) proposed a tripartite typology of European rural spaces: *periurban, rural* and *deep rural,* similar to that used for Spain by Molinero (2019). The first encompasses rural areas close to large national cities, with high tertiarization, population density and income levels; at the opposite extreme are the *deep rural* areas. In between, the rural area, characterized by intermediate values in these indicators and a significant weight of agriculture as the base of its economy.

In this diversification of rural spaces, agriculture has played an important role along with its connection to global value chains (Camarero, 2017). According to Camarero (2017), these global dynamics would be giving rise to two clearly differentiable rural areas in Spain. One type is more socioeconomically dynamic and is located mostly along the Mediterranean coast, with specialized agriculture in intensive vegetable cultivation and significant labour demand, which is driving the growth of other industries and services. The other, located inland and oriented towards the extensive cultivation of herbaceous and other industrial crops, is less labour intensive and coincides with the most depopulated rural areas, with a lack of services and a rapidly ageing population. It is precisely this "intermediate" rural space (Van Eupen et al., 2012), demographically regressive and economically centred on extensive agriculture, which the present paper focuses on. Below, we consider how the social changes of modernity/postmodernity affect this type of rural space and are transforming it. Subsequently, based on the results of the study, we consider the extent to which these dynamics can also generate opportunities for the rural youth and contribute to avoiding their abandonment of such areas.

2.1. A mobile rural society

Firstly, increasing mobility as a structural feature of late modernity (Urry, 2007; Oliva, 2010; Öztürk et al., 2014) has finished off the autonomy of the rural from the urban (Mormont, 1990; Cloke, 1996). This mobility has had a profound impact on rural society. Firstly, it has reconfigured rural spaces, as the agrarian industries and economies that used to sustain these places withdraw or are integrated into global value chains (Farrugia et al., 2014a). Secondly, the substantial improvement in communications has allowed the opening up and mobility of rural populations, diluting traditional cultural differences between countryside and city (Urry, 2007; Shucksmith, 2012).

Mobility itself has become an essential feature of rural life. People living in rural areas are constantly on the move in their daily lives, either travelling to or from their workplaces or accessing a multitude of services (Oliva, 2010; Camarero, 2017). In Spain, it has been estimated that the working rural population spends at least 4 h in an urban area two days a week (Bank of Spain, 2020).

This mobility, in combination with "reflexivity" (Giddens, 1991, 1994) and the processes of individualisation (Beck, 1992) that have been set in motion in late modernity, is transforming the relationships that people have with place (Bauman, 2013). In some cases, the connections to place undoubtedly become weaker (Jamieson, 2000; Woodman and Leccardi, 2015), although in others the tendency is for them to be rebuilt (Haukanes, 2013; Farrugia et al., 2014a).

Mobility both enables and conditions being and living in a rural environment. It can be argued, following Bauman (1992:695), that it facilitates new ways of being in the village for those who are "mobile" and at the same time limits the options of those who are not. In this regard, Fallov et al. (2013) and Henderson et al. (2007) highlighted the paradox that mobility favours the sense of belonging, while immobility undermines it.

However, mobility and immobility, while characteristic features of late modernity, are nevertheless mediated by the structure of opportunities that the place offers to each individual. As Jamieson (2000) observed, the resentment of those who are obliged to remain (trapped) is overwhelmingly due to their condition of marginality. It can likewise be argued that the positive feelings of those who voluntarily stay on are related to the good conditions that this increased mobility entails.

Nonetheless, in this context of mobility a reconfiguration of rural identity is required in which, as Farrugia et al. (2014b) put it, "narratives about imagined future lives articulate classed and gendered competencies and dispositions acquired in and through place, reflexively mobilised in life planning practices".

Thus, the general perception, especially among young adults, that the rural environment is a conservative, traditional and non-innovative space (Baek, 2004; Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003) explains why some of them desire to abandon it, while those who stay on attempt to construct their culture and identity in connection with urban spaces (Farrugia, 2016). According to Farrugia (2016), this connection may be imagined through communication technologies and/or real through actual visits or stays in urban centres.

In short, greater porosity between the urban and the rural through physical mobility and information and communications technologies (ICTs), at least for those who can afford them, would limit the loss of opportunities (employment, consumption, etc.) and the sensation of isolation that has been characteristic of these depopulated rural spaces (Holton et al., 2023), and encourage youth to stay on.

2.2. Training and the "mobility imperative"

A noteworthy aspect of the increasing social mobility that is taking place in late modernity is the pressure it now exerts on young adults through further education and training. As young adults, especially those in rural areas, gain access to further formal education and develop career aspirations, they often find themselves obliged to move away from their place of origin in search of job and career opportunities that they will not find there (Cook and Cuervo, 2018; Carr and Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007).

Educational and mobility opportunities are not evenly distributed among young adults (Rye, 2011; Byun et al., 2012; Corbett, 2013). A student's social background has a marked impact on their academic performance, not to mention their career prospects and residential aspirations. In this regard, several studies (Jamieson, 2000; Stockdale, 2002; Glendinning et al., 2003) have found that a commitment to education, a successful career and the likelihood of leaving home are more widespread, in rural spaces, among middle-class than working-class young adults.

These and other studies also show that gender is a significant variable in the relationship between training and staying on in rural areas. As studies undertaken from a gender perspective have highlighted, the more masculine makeup of the rural environment, in terms of both its labour market and its public spaces, explain the greater propensity of women to leave behind that environment (Glendinning et al., 2003; Pini et al., 2014) irrespective of their social origin or level of education (Dahlström, 1996; Sampedro, 2008).

Nonetheless, though modernity socializes us in the desire for achievement, it has to compete with other socializations, for example those that are lived in the rural environment which generate *affections* to routines and activities (manual work, agriculture, family, etc.)

associated to that place (Stahl et al., 2023; Farrugia et al., 2016; Farrugia et al., 2014a). These could contribute to inducing a young adult to reject the imperative of geographic and social mobility (Farrugia, 2016), and maintain his/her lifestyle in a known space. In the results, we will consider in which young adults this takes place.

2.3. Agriculture and rural society

The modernisation of agriculture is, among other things, an important factor behind the departure of young adults from rural areas, to the extent that it reduces direct and indirect employment opportunities in the rural environment (Argent and Walmsley, 2008; Elder and Conger, 2000), but this transformation has also been an important factor behind changes in the culture and way of life of the rural population (Camarero, 2017). For example, it has enabled an improvement in the working conditions of farmers and their standard of living, which, along with the growing interconnection between countryside and city, has given rise to some farmers having a standard of living, consumption patterns and lifestyle which closely resemble those of the urban middle classes (Hill, 2015; Marino et al., 2021; Linck, 2001). In the general context of the insecurity of the labour market, such improvements can contribute to dispelling the traditional stigmas associated with rural work and turn agriculture into a social insertion option for young adults who have the possibility of accessing it.

2.4. Social class and rurality

Increasing mobility and the profound transformation of the farming sector have been shaping a rural lifestyle that differs little from present-day urban life (Kaletta, 2020; Rye 2006).

Rural communities, however, like urban communities, are not homogeneous in their social structure. In this context of mobility and varying opportunities for social insertion, the presence of those who stay on in their rural environment appears to be ultimately conditioned, as has been seen, by the economic resources and the different types of capital that young adults, or their families, can access.

This also impacts on the social construction of the rural space that the different groups or collectives that live in it carry out. With this in mind, various authors have called for an "interpretative approach to class" (Phillips, 2002) that takes into account the different positions and perspectives of rurality of those who live in rural communities. Rye (2006, 2011) pointed out that young adults socially construct rurality differently depending on their social class when this is defined, following Bourdieu, as the combination of economic capital (income) and cultural capital (education). Thus, according to Rye and Blekesaune (2007), young adults whose families have low cultural capital and low income as well as those from families of high income and high cultural capital, have, on average, more positive views of the rural environment in which they live than those whose families have low economic capital and high cultural capital or high economic capital and low cultural capital.

Along the same lines, Jamieson (2000) argued that the wide range of attitudes of place attachment and detachment expressed by young adults in his research are better explained in terms of the old categories of social class, gender and socialisation than in terms of the categories of consumption, choice and lifestyle proposed for postmodern society analyses.

Similarly, Shucksmith (2012), following the work of Savage (2010), Murdoch (1995) and Smith and Phillips (2001), goes further when arguing that place is inextricably linked to class, power and inequality to the extent that class should be seen not only as a given from which rurality is perceived in one way or another, but additionally as a process of social construction in which different competing groups try to define place and its meanings according to their own interests.

It is therefore necessary, in an analysis of young adults remaining in their place of origin, to pay attention to the perspective that such people have of the rural space according to the socio-economic circumstances that make their staying-on possible.

3. Spanish context and study area

Whereas, in the early stages of Spanish development (1950s and 1960s), emigration to focal points of economic growth was driven by the existence of a surplus and unqualified labour force in rural areas, today those leaving rural and inland Spain tend to be the most highly qualified. They are driven away principally by the lack of skilled jobs in these regions (Díaz-Lanchas et al., 2022).

Behind this phenomenon is the increasingly high level of education that young adults have been acquiring in recent decades, especially in some of the more economically depressed inland areas of Spain which have nevertheless historically tended to place great emphasis on education. These include Castile and León (González-Leonardo and López-Gay, 2019), the region in which the study area of the present research is found (Fig. 1).

Castile and León is one of the most sparsely populated regions of Spain and has one of its highest rates of rurality (Prieto-Lara and Ocaña-Riola, 2010). Between 2010 and 2020 alone, after the preceding economic crisis, the region lost 6.5% of its population. This was two decimal points more than in the 1960s, the decade which previously held the record for the most intense rural exodus (CaixaBank, 2021:9). However, its population is characterized by a high level of education. According to data from the 2011 Census, 36.2% of those from the region aged 25–39 had a university degree, a percentage that drops to 32.2% at national level (González-Leonardo and López-Gay, 2019:2). It is also the region which most young adults leave, in relative terms, for other regions of Spain, something that is particularly the case for those with a university degree. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable among young adults from towns with fewer than 2000 inhabitants (González-Leonardo and López-Gay, 2019: 21).

The area in which the research for this paper was carried out is situated in the centre of this region, in the rural area of the province of Valladolid. Although it has an important industrial district in its capital and surrounding areas, which also acts as a centre of attraction for the region as a whole, most of the province is markedly rural and agricultural.

After excluding the capital city, the surrounding villages and two municipalities with more than 20,000 inhabitants, the study area comprises 200 municipalities, 75% of which have fewer than 500 inhabitants, with an average population density in the area of 20 inhabitants/km^2.

However, these municipalities are situated in an extensive plain of 8200 km^2 whose communication routes between them and with the city of Valladolid do not present special difficulties. It is possible to reach the city from these municipalities in one's own vehicle in an average time of 30–45 min, although mobility in the region in terms of public transport is less efficient.

Terrain orography and climatological conditions are suitable for rainfed agriculture, which has experienced intense mechanisation in recent decades along with specialisation in the extensive cultivation of cereals and herbaceous crops (Molinero et al., 2016). In consequence, there has been a substantial reduction in the active population employed in the sector. In addition, as agriculture is the economic pillar of the area, its modernisation affects the employment-related dynamism of other economic sectors.

The occupational structure of the area therefore presents modern characteristics, with a predominant service sector but a significant agricultural sector weight, as can be seen in Table 1.
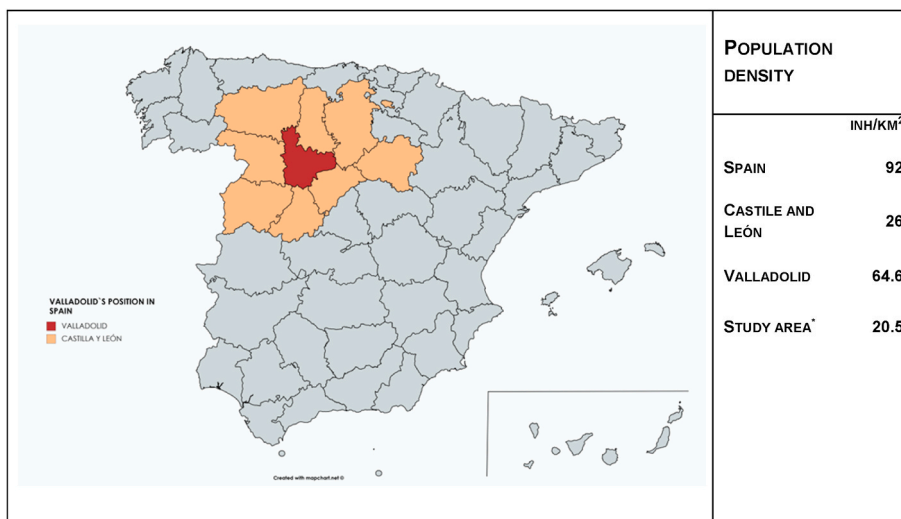
Fig. 1. Population density. Spain, Castile and León, Valladolid. 2017.
Source: Own elaboration based on the 2016 Castile and León Statistical Yearbook

Table 1
Employment structure of the study area.

	Workers	%
Services	17,907	50.1
Construction	2849	8.0
Industry	8237	23.0
Agriculture	6777	18.9

Source: Own elaboration based on 2016 social security data obtained from the Provincial Society for the Development of Valladolid (SODEVA by its initials in Spanish). Available at: http://212.227.102.53/diputacion_valladolid_sodeva /ventana_sistema_indicadores.aspx

In this changing "intermediate" (Van Eupen et al., 2012) rural context, a significant number of young adults leave their villages of origin for the provincial capital or the country's economic development axes. However, a no less significant number choose to stay on or, at the very least, would like to do so. Hence the interest in studying, in this context, the factors and circumstances that explain and influence the decisions made by young adults on whether to remain in their rural areas of origin or move on.

4. Methodology

In view of the aim of the analysis, a qualitative methodology was chosen to capture the concrete circumstances and judgements of rural young adults about their expectations and desires.

In accordance with this methodology, 41 young adults of both sexes from the study area, aged between 24 and 29, were interviewed in early 2017. It was considered that this age group was the most appropriate to cover the objectives of the study, since it is at this age that young Spanish people tend to leave home and gain their independence (Injuve, 2021:113), as the prolongation of education and the precarious nature of the Spanish labour market commonly do not allow this to happen earlier.

The interviewees were contacted by different professionals working with young adults in the area, including social workers and managers of Spain's Youth Information Points (which form part of the Network of Youth Information Centres).

Sample selection was based on two main criteria, educational level and employment status, which could hypothetically have a significant influence on their residential expectations. Table 2 shows the distribution of the young adults interviewed according to these criteria and gender.

The 'open interview' technique was used. The interviewees were asked about their training and labour market insertion itineraries, their residential expectations and the opportunities for social and labour market insertion that they perceived in their environment, given their personal circumstances, as well as the socio-economic resources of their family of origin.

This enabled a subsequent differentiation among them of varying situations in terms of their social origin (see Table 3), which in turn facilitated a comparative analysis of their residential aspirations, their perception of their environment and the reasons and justifications, in their opinion, for their remaining in or leaving their place of origin.

It was evident from their interviews that most of the participants will eventually leave home and integrate into the society outside the area they were brought up in. This is in line with the powerful factors of expulsion from the rural environment that are currently acting on them. However, despite these factors, at least a third of the young adults interviewed plan to stay on in their place of origin while others openly acknowledge that they would like to do so but believe it will be impossible.

Based on their experiences, an analysis was carried out on the influence of social origin, educational level and gender on the decision of young adults to stay on in their rural areas.

5. Results

The economic and cultural dynamics of modern society push most rural young adults to integrate into society outside their place of origin. In contrast to this general trend, certain specific factors and circumstances drive, or at least allow, some young adults to plan their lives in their place of origin. Below, we analyse these circumstances in terms of social origin, educational level and gender, trying to understand what are the dynamics/factors that, in the conditions of late modernity, explain the decision of young adults to stay on in their rural environment.

For analytical reasons, we will deal firstly with the cases of young adults who undertake their own economic activity as a strategy for socio-occupational integration, and secondly with those who try to integrate into the local labour market on the basis of their qualifications/training and professional prospects.

Table 2
Educational level and occupational status of the interviewees.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS											
EDUCATION[a]	NON-ACTIVE		UNEMPLOYED		TEMPORARY		PERMANENT		SELF-EMPLOYED		TOTAL
SEX	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
≤ Compulsory Secondary Education			1	3	1	1	2	1	1		10
Post-compulsory Secondary Education[b]	1	1		2	1	1	2	1	2	2	13
Higher Education[c]	2	5	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	18
Sub-totals	3	6	2	6	4	4	5	3	5	3	41
TOTAL	9		8		8		8		8		41

[a] Level achieved independently of whether a higher level has been initiated or not.
[b] Eleven with an Intermediate Vocational Training Diploma, and two with a High School Diploma.
[c] Fifteen with University Studies and 3 with Higher Vocational Training Diploma.

Table 3
Social origin of the interviewees.

	Interviewees
Medium-sized farmers/Owners of medium-sized farm holdings. Economically self-sufficient with the farming alone	6
Small-sized farmers/Owners of small-sized farm holdings. Generally require complementary animal husbandry for economic self-sufficiency	4
Unskilled manual workers	15
Skilled manual workers	9
Small scale entrepreneurs	3
Professionals or specialists	4
Total	41

5.1. Return and entrepreneurship as a strategy for labour market insertion

As has been seen, the opportunities for economic integration in the study area are scarce. Hence, the majority of those who have already decided to stay on (8/13) have opted to set up their own business as a means of economic integration. Of these eight, six work in the agricultural sector, while the other two (both women) work in the service sector. One runs a paint shop inherited from her father, and the other has set up an architectural firm, taking advantage of her family's good social and economic position in the area.

The interviews with the young farmers in particular show how young adults are oriented from childhood towards social integration outside their place of origin (in the city), with encouragements to study. Consequently, this orientation initially led them to follow training paths that took them away from agriculture and the rural environment and to enter other economic sectors outside the study area, generally in the city. All of them sought employment or ended up taking jobs that for one reason or another proved unsatisfactory. Among the reasons given for leaving these jobs, their precarious nature stood out along with the personal dissatisfaction they felt about the work they were doing.

R- It wasn't that I didn't like the work itself, but it was the boss and that … you know, in the end they just wear you down, demanding more than they're willing to give. I told him that something had to change and he wouldn't accept it, so in the end …

Q- [So] you left the job and decided to return to [the village] …

R- Yes, exactly, if I was going to give up the job it was always going to be to come back here, you know. I didn't look for anything else there, and I came back and haven't looked for any more work since, and I have no intention of doing so while things are going well for me here …

(Male, 27; Intermediate Vocational Training Diploma in Electricity, crop and livestock farmer, I6[1])

For this reason, the 6 returned to the village to take over or join existing family farms.

In the case of the two young non-farmer females, the factor that explains their remaining in the village is not so much the bad experience they had working outside it but rather the opportunity provided by their families to take over or set up their own business in the village in an economic context in which job offers for them were few and far between.

I was doing an internship for two years while at the same time doing a Master's in Madrid. Eventually the moment came when I just thought "look, either set yourself up as self-employed or ….". There was just no work, nothing.

(Female, 26, Degree in Architecture, self-employed, I5)

In this strategy of economic integration (of the 8 young rural adults included in this section), there is undoubtedly an opportunity factor that other young adults do not have. These young adults return to their place of origin, after unsuccessfully trying their hand elsewhere, because their parents have capital that they can draw on. In other words, we are dealing with economic, human or social capital that has logical links to the place, as previously referenced studies have indicated.

This insertion model, it should be noted, is not exclusive to young rural people, as it corresponds to 'family attachment' (young adults whose labour integration is carried out through family businesses or companies), one of the six means of social integration of young Spaniards identified by Casal (Casal et al., 2006; Casal, 1996). What is specific to young farmers as a factor of connection to place is their predisposition for work in the countryside and the pleasure they get from it.

Q- [As a child] did you like the countryside, working outdoors in the fields?

R- Well yes …, I like going with my dad on the tractor … I've always liked, seen it as something good and … I don't know, I've always wanted to stay here.

(Male, 24, Intermediate Vocational Training in Mechanics, crop and livestock farmer, I3)

Early socialisation in agricultural and family activities is undoubtedly an important aspect that explains why these young adults end up returning to their place of origin in their process of social integration. They are ultimately driven, as suggested in Farrugia et al. (2016), by individual predispositions and habitus acquired in their childhood or by

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[1] In all quotes, the gender, age, educational and employment situation of the interviewee is provided, as well as the interview number.

participation in certain activities that generate a sense of belonging or identification with their place of origin.

However, despite a predisposition for work in the countryside, the likelihood of successful integration in the rural environment and their thoughts about it vary depending on the size and the economic viability of the business they enter.

Thus, those who work on a relatively large farm (medium-sized farm holdings, see Table 3), with a cultivable area that allows them to devote themselves solely to agriculture, enjoy work and living conditions that facilitate enormously their presence in the rural environment, especially in terms of mobility and the availability of time to lead a modern life-style, as shown by the hobby of travelling of this young farmer, one which he would be unable to enjoy if his labour activity did not permit it, as happens with others:

Me, I like to travel a lot, I go on trips whenever I can and more.

(Male, 29, Technical Engineer in Agriculture, farmer, I27)

Consequently, these young adults have a positive view of rural life and at the same time show a critical attitude towards urban culture and its appeal.

[Those who leave] … think that life in the city is better, which I reckon is also a very typical urbanite attitude. I think we've created a very, very, very urbanite society. And … ugh, I think that nowadays girls too are very urbanite, too much so … OK, you can find people who [like the village] but you can see them being pulled by the city. I don't know if it's because of the lifestyle model that's being pushed. But the consumption model that's pushed you could have it here easily enough … that's the reality. Because it takes me 30 minutes, if not more, to get to the Río Shopping Centre in the city, and the same coming back …

(Male, 29, Technical Engineer in Agriculture, farmer, I27)

On the other hand, those who work on a small farm (small-sized farm holdings, Table 3) are forced to complement or expand their activity with different types of livestock. This implies tougher economic, work-ing and lifestyle conditions, especially because the proper management of a livestock farm requires continuous dedicated work on a daily basis. This limits tremendously their mobility and presence in leisure spaces where they can interrelate with other young adults and which are generally located in urban areas or at some considerable distance from where they live.

It can be a bit tough until you get used to it, especially for your social life because when your friends tell you that they're off to the beach or somewhere you can only wish them a good time and say you can't go with them as every day the animals have to be fed or the cows milked.

(Female, 24, Intermediate Vocational Training in Electromechanics, livestock farmer, I18)

This immobility is perhaps the greatest obstacle these youths have to face in their decision to stay on in their place of origin. In consequence, they mention some negative aspects in their assessment of rural life:

If you go out for a bit in the afternoon/evening, say to have a beer in some bar, and there's nobody around …

(Male, 27; Intermediate Vocational Training Diploma in Electricity, crop and livestock farmer, I6)

These attitudes reflect the tension between their choice of life and the appeal of an urban existence. This tension is especially reflected in the care they take in choosing the type of livestock farm with which they intend to expand or complement their farm, striving to strike a balance between investment/profitability on the one hand, and the demands in terms of time and work of each type of livestock farm on the other.

Q- What made you decide to set this up [a pig farm]?

R- I used to really love the countryside, but arable farming on its own was leaving money a bit tight.

(…)

Q- And sheep farming [had you thought about that]?

R- As my mum says, that does bring in money straightaway. She was more for it than my dad because her dad, my grandad, has sheep … and it's clear that the money comes in from day one. But it's a Monday to Sunday job, morning and afternoon … it's a different type of work …

Harder, more enslaving, right?

[Yes] and as my grandpa says, if you had a brother and you got on well it would be worthwhile, but not if it's for just one person … [it is very tough]. (Male, 27; Intermediate Vocational Training Diploma in Electricity, crop and livestock farmer, I6)

5.2. Training and the rural labour market

The young adults who take advantage of the economic and social capital of their families to plan their lives in their place of origin are only a part of those who remain. Others strive to do so looking for a job in which they can somehow reconcile their desire to stay on in the place where they live with their work and professional aspirations. These as-pirations are principally conditioned by their educational achievements.

We found in our sample of interviewees, as also indicated in the literature, that the desire to abandon their rural environment was higher in those with more advanced levels of education. This trend, again indicated in the literature, is also stronger among women than men.

Likewise, it was found that the level and type of educational studies attained is related to social class. Young people from the professional/ white collar class and the landowning middle class usually have uni-versity degrees in fields with high rates of employment (engineering, natural sciences, law). This is likely to have a heavy influence, pulling them away from their place of origin in their process of social integra-tion. However, these young adults do not give up their links with their village, which allows them to enjoy the best of both countryside and city.

Q- Where would you like to live in the future, or where do you think you'll end up living?

R- No idea.

Q- You don't know?

R–No, I really don't. I'd like to keep hold of the house here [in the village], and my grandparents' place too, 'cos the village is the village, you know. I do consider myself a touch urbanite, but in summer with the local fiesta the village just comes alive. In winter-time I'm a bit more lazy about coming back, as it's just a plain fact that there's very little going on here then, even though this is one of the bigger villages, but … I'd like to continue coming back to the village, well every year, when I have my holidays, at weekends …

(Female, 25, Law Degree, internee, I38)

However, for most young adults, who are from families with less economic and social capital and also lower levels of education and employability, the residential project presents itself as a dilemma: "to stay or to go". If the roots are shallow but the professional prospects high, such people will leave, as in the paradigmatic case of women from humble origins but high levels of education.

In contrast, the levels of education are lower and the levels of attachment to place higher among those who plan to stay on in the village or, at the very least, would like to do so. This results in the

opportunity cost of remaining being lower, as by staying on they do not sacrifice profiting from a high level of education in the labour market, which can increase the desirability of the village. In this group, comprising a third of the interviewees, various situations can be distinguished. One involves that of young male adults who fail or drop out of school early and are from working class families or families with small-sized holdings. These young adults, perhaps less motivated by their families to study and under greater pressure for early integration in the labour market, have easy access to employment thanks to a favourable predisposition to manual, hard or precarious work in the rural environment.

Q- OK, you told me that you like the work you do, right?

R- Yes, yes, I like what I do, I like building houses and seeing how people react, I want that and then seeing the happiness on their faces when the keys are handed over, I like that.

Q- Even though the work is hard … ?

R- It's tough, it's hard, yes.

(Male, 27, Compulsory Secondary Education, construction worker, I13)

In these cases, less immersed in a culture of merit and less attached to urban life, work is not the determining factor for residential expectations. On the contrary, their attachment to the place where they have always lived makes them adjust their work expectations to the local market.

However, given the characteristics of the local labour market, it is clear that, in addition to social class, another factor of major importance along this life path is gender. So, the situation above is not the same for the female and male interviewees with similar socio-economic and educational characteristics. Unlike their male counterparts, the women tend to display a strong desire to go to the city, but more because of the lack of lifestyle-related opportunities than work-related ones, as they can generally find employment if they want in small towns or villages. They identify emancipation, as exemplified in the following quote, with abandonment of their place of origin.

Q- Do you want to become independent?

R- Yes. I want to leave the village as soon as I find a job elsewhere. I want to go to Valladolid, to go there because I get so bored here.

Q- But you're looking for a job?

R- Yes. That's right. Well, I've been offered a job as a waitress in a place in a nearby village, but …, but well the fact is I want to go and live in Valladolid (Female, 27, Intermediate Vocational Training Diploma in Hairdressing, unemployed. I41)

The situation is different for young adults of middle/lower social class who have continued their post-school education but in vocational training or studies in subjects with moderate/low levels of employability in their region, and who have a strong attachment to their place of origin. They would all prefer to continue living in the village but, although not professionally ambitious, the feasibility of staying on in the village will ultimately depend on whether they can find a job in the area or not. If they find one they will stay, and if not they will have to leave.

Q- How likely is it that you'll stay on in the village? Is there any work for you in the area?

R- Well, maybe in Medina del Campo, which isn't that far away, if I could get a job there, and my boyfriend as well or somewhere close by. We'd maybe have to move, but just from one village to another.

(Female, 24, Intermediate Vocational Training as Laboratory Technician, unemployed, I29)

The feeling of attachment of these young adults with a certain educational capital does not come so much from their identification with the rural environment, with its activities or its specific way of life, as from their integration in a dense local network of social relations: relationships with partners in some cases and in others with friends or acquaintances.

Q- Why do you like living in the village?

R- Well, because I do! It's nice and quiet in the village and we all know one another, and I love that!

(Female, 24, Intermediate Vocational Training as Laboratory Technician, unemployed, I29)

Q- So, you're clear about it, right? If you can, you'll stay on here in the village …

R- If I can, yes.

Q- You've got a sister who's living in Valladolid … What's the difference between the two of you in that respect? Because she's left, but you'd prefer to stay.

R- Well, she, I don't know, it's more that here in the village her group of friends are all guys, it's just her and two or three of them. So she stays at home more and doesn't really go out very much. So, she doesn't want to be here if she hardly goes out and there's very few of her age group and so on. But me, for example, well there's quite a few the same age as me. There's Jairo and …, well there's about ten of us.

(Female, 28, Higher Vocational Training Diploma in Pre-school Education, temporary pre-school monitor, I15).

Among the interviewees, we found that this type of relationship, peer relationships, best explained the desire to stay in the place of origin, rather than family relationships which were never mentioned as a driving factor. This contrasts with other studies, such as that of Cuervo and Wyn (2017) which, in the case of Australia and among adults almost in their forties, highlights the importance of family and intergenerational relationships in the decision to stay in or return to one's place of origin. This difference is probably attributable to the age of the interviewees (24–29 years old) -when their family obligations (to parents, etc.) are likely to be lower in intensity than if they were 10 or 20 years older-, and to the fact that the area that is studied is not a remote area and so frequent contact with parents or other family members is relatively easy to maintain, even when living away from the point of origin. As seen in other studies on feelings of attachment to specific spaces (Stahl and Habid, 2017), the interviews held with these young adults reveal the importance of place for them as a social space in the configuration of their identity in late modernity irrespective of whether the place in question pertains to a rural environment or not, or indeed whether they consider it a more or a less depressed area.

6. Discussion

From the analysis undertaken it can be deduced that, in the context of late modernity, whether or not young adults stay on in rural areas is articulated and explained by two factors: their attachment/feeling of belonging to their place of origin and the opportunities for integration in the labour market that the rural space in question offers them.

However, as has been seen, both attachment and job opportunities are not homogeneously distributed among young adults but differ depending on educational attainment, social background and gender. These characteristics interact with each other and with the structural conditions of the place (Glendinning et al., 2003; Nugin, 2019), shaping the identity and the residential expectations of young adults.

In the analysis undertaken in this paper, those who remain or would prefer to remain in their place of origin highlight, first of all, the importance of place in their decision to stay. In some cases, their rootedness is due both to the opportunity to mobilise place-associated

capital and to a predisposition to work in the countryside, the source of which, as has been seen, can be traced back to early socialisation. However, for most, the importance of place in shaping their identity and residential expectations is derived not so much from its rural character as from the fact that it is a social space of relationships, lending plausibility to Elder's (1994) "linked lives" concept. In this research, it is found that the sense of belonging to the place of origin is largely based on relationships with peer groups, with no evidence found in this case, unlike Cuervo and Wyn (2017), for the influence of family relationships. In any case, our findings attest, as seen in other studies (Glendinning et al., 2003; Jones, 1999), to the importance of social integration as a key element of rootedness. This integration, as shown by Jones (1999), is not a given but is rather a product of their interaction with the community in which they were brought up, which explains to a large extent why some want to stay and others do not.

In the context of late modernity, links to place are, as Bauman (1992, 1996, 1998) argues, undoubtedly weakening. This can be seen, in this and other research, by those who project their lives beyond their place of origin. However, in conditions of late modernity, ties to place are also transformed and reflexively reconstructed, as Farrugia (2016) points out. Thus, it has been seen that young farmers and professionals who have successfully achieved economic integration in their place of origin travel to the city when they wish to do so. As a result, they do not feel deprived or any form of exclusion because of their living in the village, and this even allows them to articulate a critical discourse against urban culture, as also observed by Holton and Finn (2018). However, young farmers with more precarious economic integration have fewer mobility options and are more affected by what the village cannot offer compared to the city, and consequently show less satisfaction with their life in rural areas.

Thus, as Nugin (2019), Rye (2006) or Haukanes (2013) have indicated, nowadays mobility can turn what is strictly 'local' into a positive resource of identity, paradoxically favouring continuation in the rural place of origin. In contrast, a condition of immobility negatively conditions the presence and perspective that young adults have of the place where they live (Bernard et al., 2019; Bernard, 2019; Oliva, 2010).

Likewise, the level of education and training attained by young adults interacts with the job opportunities of the rural space and the feeling of belonging, conditioning their presence in it, driving those with higher education levels away from their place of origin (Farrugia, 2016; Corbett, 2007) but also moulding the employment and residential prospects of those with lower educational/training qualifications, although this varies with gender (Glendinning et al., 2003; Dahlström, 1996). It was thus possible to determine how young male adults with low educational levels are more inclined to stay on in their place of origin, adapt their professional expectations to the local labour market and show satisfaction with village life. However, in this study, the opposite effect was found in the case of young women with low levels of education.

On the other hand, those with an intermediate level of education, who are often absent from the debate on the social integration of young adults (Roberts, 2011; Gayle et al., 2016), are torn between leaving and staying. Many of them, without great career prospects or clear social roots, try to stay, but whether this happens or not will ultimately depend on their finding a job in the area (minimally aligned with their training) that makes this possible. This group of young adults is interesting from the point of view of policies promoting ties to the community, as it is a group of young men and women who are willing to stay in their place of origin on the condition that there exist the minimum conditions for integration in the labour market.

As has been seen, the level of education is a determining factor in shaping the residential expectations and identity of young rural adults. This is undoubtedly the main expression of individual achievement in late modernity. However, both mobility and opportunities for social integration in the place of origin, as well as training, appear to be mediated by social origin and family resources (Nugin, 2019; Stahl et al.,

2023).

For instance, especially in the case of young farmers, the current presence of young adults in a rural environment with few job opportunities is partly due to, or made possible by, the mobilisation of economic and social capital of family origin linked to the place. At the same time, their mobility depends on the economic conditions of their integration in the rural environment, which in turn derives from the mobilisation of this capital.

Likewise, social background and education appear to overlap among the young adults interviewed, concealing an important part of the determination of class (Furlong, 2009). As the literature points out, there is a clear association between educational achievements and social origin, and by extension with the residential expectations of young rural adults, as evidenced in this research.

Thus, social class continues to emerge in late modernity as a powerful determinant of the residential expectations of young adults and their perspective of the rural space in which they live, in line with the contributions of Rye and Blekesaune (2007) and Jamieson (2000).

7. Conclusions

The main contribution of this study is its focus on the factors that explain the permanence of young rural adults in their place of origin, in contrast to the abundance of studies which have focussed on the processes of abandonment of the rural environment.

This approach has made it possible to capture the continuing importance of "place" in shaping the identity of rural young adults and their residential expectations, as well as social class and gender, as opposed to second modernity theories that generally question the role of classical structural factors in the identity of individuals in late modernity (Bauman, Beck, Giddens). This study adds evidence and can be included among works that claim in late modernity the persistence of the influence of these structural factors in people's lives, such as those by Furlong (2009), Jamieson (2000) or Shucksmith (2012).

In this sense, this study has shown that the importance of place in the configuration of the identity of the young adults does not derive so much from the uniqueness of the area as a rural space as from the social links (Coulter et al., 2016) that young people maintain in the area in which they have grown up. It also shows that mobility, as a characteristic feature of late modernity, also affects rural spaces and participates in the processes of social construction and evaluation of these spaces by young rural adults, thereby becoming a positive resource for their identity and permanence in their place of origin. In contrast, immobility, or difficulties to move between the place of origin and other locations (especially the city), appears as a negative element that enhances the feeling of deprivation and marginality, along the lines proposed by Fallov et al. (2013) and Henderson et al. (2007).

The study also makes clear the influence that classic structural factors such as social class and gender have on the processes of rootedness and permanence, as they interact with social insertion opportunities and the educational achievements of the young adults. In this regard, the study shows the positive role played in permanence by having economic and social capital rooted in the place, and how low social origin and low educational qualifications affect differently the labour and residential expectations of young men and women.

In summary, in late modernity, in advanced societies with high degrees of mobility and extensive education/training opportunities, the residential expectations of young rural adults and their conception of rural space are not conditioned by individual achievements or preferences, nor by structural features, but by a combination of both, as Furlong (2009) would say, giving rise to what Rye (2011) describes as a "structured freedom". As has been seen, educational achievements and personal preferences in terms of residence and lifestyle are important, but so too are social background and gender.

More in-depth work, however, is required into today's relationships between social status, the different ways of constructing the rural

environment and the various forms of existence in it, since the rural environment, in its ongoing process of redefinition and transformation, is, as Shucksmith (2012) argues, an arena of contention between the different groups that inhabit it.

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José Javier Callejo-González: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Jesús Antonio Ruiz-Herrero:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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