

Chapter 16

Perspectives on Female Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas: The Role of Women in Tourism Companies in Sever do Vouga, Portugal

Ofélia Tavares

University of Aveiro, Portugal

Zélia Breda

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5882-063X>

GOVCOPP, University of Aveiro, Portugal

Rui Costa

GOVCOPP, University of Aveiro, Portugal

Gorete Dinis

GOVCOPP, Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Women are increasingly taking part in the business market, especially in the case of tourism. However, studies reveal that entrepreneurial women, besides the business, have other tasks, such as domestic and family obligations, being the majority responsible for the family management. The main purpose of this chapter is to investigate the contribution of entrepreneurial women in tourism companies in rural areas. A survey was applied, through a semi-structured interview, to a total of 13 tourism companies located in the municipality of Sever do Vouga (Portugal). The results indicate that although women are fewer and working together with their husbands, they are already retired, which facilitates dedication and commitment to the business on a full-time basis. Younger women with children may encounter barriers that make it harder for them to dedicate themselves to the enterprise. This research contributes to a better definition of the profile and behaviour of entrepreneurial women in rural areas, as well as identifying the motivations and barriers to invest in rural tourism.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, the rural world is regarded as a territory that is not only intended for food production and labour supply, but also an increasingly multifunctional area associated with recreation, leisure, well-being and quality of life (Atterton & Ward, 2007; Augusto, Pinho & Rodrigues, 2010; Jepson, 2015; Silva, Figueiredo, Eusébio, & Carneiro, 2016). The population density of rural areas is low, as it is the case of the industrialization process (Ma, Jiang, Li, & Zhou, 2018). Tourism becomes a relevant activity in terms of development and competitive advantage of rural areas due to their relevant resources (Salvatore, Chiodo, & Fantini, 2018). It is a key sector for the development of more disadvantaged areas, stimulating the recovery and preservation of the heritage, the development of the local economy, through the creation of new jobs and the dynamization and diversification of local production (Huang, Beeco, Hallo, & Norman, 2016; Reis, 2012). Given these evidences, the public sector has a supervisory and stimulating role, eventually contributing to incentives and development strategies aimed specifically at rural areas, thus providing the emergence of micro enterprises with the intention of generating tourism flows, strengthening the economy and resources (Lai, Morrison-Saunders, & Grimstad, 2017).

Nowadays, women are increasingly taking part in the business market (Costa, Bakas, Breda, Durão, Carvalho, & Caçador, 2017), especially in the case of tourism companies in rural areas. But studies reveal that entrepreneurial women, besides the business, have other tasks, such as domestic and family obligations, being the majority responsible for all family management (McGowan, Redeker, Cooper, & Greenan, 2012; Toros & Altinay, 2018). This points to the fact that the time available for business is limited, viewing the activity as something to pass the time (Pato, 2012). According to Costa, Carvalho and Breda (2012), men are more likely to get involved in business, while women more easily engage in administrative work.

Given the potential for growth and business development provided by tourism, this work intends to investigate the contribution of women in tourism companies in rural areas. It is questioned whether women have an interventive role in entrepreneurship, both in terms of skills and motivation, and can contribute to the development of rural tourism. In this way, it is necessary to understand the importance of entrepreneurship in rural areas, reconciling the attributes that these areas have to offer. It is intended, therefore, to observe the main motivations and the main reasons for setting up the business. In this context, it is important to focus on the concept of entrepreneur, who is a creative person that likes to set goals and is aware of the environment in which he/she is embedded for the benefit of future businesses (Filion, 1999). By analysing female entrepreneurs, this research can contribute to a better definition of the profile and behaviour of entrepreneurial women in rural areas, as well as the role of gender in these areas.

The chapter is organized as follows: first, the literature on new dynamics in rural areas and the role of tourism is reviewed, following which gender in entrepreneurship is addressed, namely the profile of the entrepreneur, main motivations and barriers. Subsequently, the methodology used for the empirical study is described in more detail. Finally, research findings are reported and discussed, and their implications for further research and applications are highlighted.

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